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IDALIA:

A Novel.

BY

"OUIDA,"

AUTHOR OF "CHANDOS," "STRATHMORE," ETC. ETC.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
1883
CITY OF WASHINGTON.

PHILADELPHIA:
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IDALIA.

CHAPTER I.

THE BORDER EAGLE.

It was a summer day late in the year in the wild moorland of the old Border.

An amber light was on the lochs, a soft mist on field and fell; the salmon-waters were leaping down from rock to rock, or boiling in the deep black pools beneath the birches; the deer were herding in the glens and wooded dips that sheltered under the Cheviot range, here, in the debatable land between the northern country and the Southrons, where Bothwell had swept with his mad Moss troopers, ere the Warden of the Marches let passion run riot for his fair White Queen, and where Belted Will's Tower still rose above its oaks, as when the bugle blast of the Howard sounded from its turrets, and the archers were marshaled against a night-raid of the Scots. On the distant seas, which once had been dark with the galleys of Norse pirates, nothing now was in sight but a fisher-boat in the offing; on the heather-moors, which had once echoed with the beat of horses' hoofs, as Douglas or Percy had scoured through the gorse for a dashing Border fray, or a Hotspur piece of derring-do, there was only now to be heard the flap of a wild-duck's wing as the flocks rose among the sedges; and the sole monarch of earth or sky was a solitary golden eagle soaring upward to the sun.

With a single swoop the bird had come down from his eyrie among the rocks, as though he were about to drop earthward; then, lifting his head, he had spread his pinions in the wind that was blowing strong and fresh from

Scotland through the heat of the August day, and sailed upward gloriously with slow majestic motion through the light. Far below him lay the white-crested waves gleaming afar off, the purple stretch of the dark moors and marshes, the black still tarns, the rounded masses of the woods; higher and higher, leaving earth beneath him, he rose in his royal grandeur, fronting the sun, and soaring onward, and upward, against the blue skies and the snowy piles of clouds, rejoicing in his solitude, and kingly in his strength.

With his broad wings spread in the sun-gleam, he swept through the silent air, his eyes looking at the luminance which blinds the eyes of men, his empire taken in the vastness of the space that monarchs cannot gauge, and his plumes stretched in all the glory of his godlike freedom, his unchained liberty of life. Far beneath him, deep down among the tangled mass of heather and brown moor grasses, glistened the lean cruel steel of a barrel, like the shine of a snake's back, pointing upward, while the eagle winged his way aloft; there, in his proud kingship with the sun, how could he note or know the steel tube, scarce larger, from his altitude, than a needle's length, of his foe, hidden deep among the gorse and reeds? The sovereign bird rose higher and higher still, in stately flight. One sharp sullen report rang through the silence; a single gray puff of smoke curled up from the heather; a death-cry echoed on the air, quivering with a human agony; the eagle wheeled once round, a dizzy circle in the summer light, then dropped down through the sunny air—stricken and dead.

Was it more murder when Cæsar fell?

The assassin rose from where he had knelt on one knee among the gorse while his retriever had started the wild-fowl up from the sedges of a pool, and strode through bracken and heath to the spot where his science had brought down the eagle, at a distance, and with an aim, which marked him as one of the first shots in Europe. A hundred yards brought him to the place where his quarry had fallen, and he thrust the heather aside with impatient movement; he was keen in sport as a Shikari, and he had looked for no rarer game to-day than the blackcocks or the snipes, or at very best a heron from the marshes.

On the moor the King-bird lay, the pinions broken and powerless, the breast-feathers wet and bathed in blood, the piercing eyes, which loved the sun, blind and glazed with film; the life, a moment before strong, fearless, and rejoicing in the light, was gone. A feeling, new and strange, came on his slayer, as he stood there in the stillness of the solitary moor, alone with the dead eagle lying at his feet. He paused, and leaned on his rifle, looking downward:

"God forgive me. I have taken a life better than my own!"

The words were involuntary, and unlike enough to one whose superb shot had become noted from the jungles of Northern India to the ice-plains of Norway; from the bear-haunts of the Danube to the tropic forests of the Amazons. But he stood looking down on the mighty bird, while the red blood welled through the blossoming furze, with something that was almost remorse. It looked strangely like *slaughter*, in the still golden gleam of the summer day.

If you wonder at it, wait until you see an eagle die on a solitary moorland that was his kingdom by right divine, with all the glorious liberty of life.

The skill which you would have challenged the first marksman in Europe to have beaten, will look, for a second at least, oddly base, and treacherous, and cowardly, when the Lord of the Air lies, like carrion, at your feet.

Knee-deep in the purple heather, the destroyer leant on his gun, alone on the Scotch side of the Border, with the sea flashing like a line of silver light on his left, and the bold sweep of the Cheviot Hills fronting him. The golden eagle had fallen by no unworthy foe; he was a man of very lofty stature, and of powerful build and sinew, his muscles close knit, and his frame like steel, as became one who was in hard condition from year's end to year's end. His complexion was a clear bronze, almost as dark as an Arab's, though originally it had been fair enough; his black sweeping moustaches and beard were long, thick, and silken; his eyes, large, and very thoughtful, the hue of the eagle's he had shot. His features were bold, proud, and frank, while his bearing had the distinction of blood, with the dash of a soldier, the reposeful stateliness of the old régime, with the alert keenness of a man used to rapid action, clear de-

cision, coolness under danger, and the wiles of the world in all its ways. Standing solitary there on the brown heath, his form rose tall and martial enough for one of the night riders of Liddesdale, or the Knight of Snowdon himself, against the purple haze and amber light.

In the days of Chevy Chase and Flodden Field his race had been the proudest of the nobles on the Border-side, their massive keep reared in face of the Cheviots, the lands their own, over miles of rock, and gorse, and forest, lords of all the Marches stretching to the sea. Now all that belonged to him was that wild barren moorland which gave nothing but the blackcock and the ptarmigan which bred in their wastes; and a hunting-lodge, half in ruins, to the westward, buried under hawthorn, birch, and ivy, a roost for owls and a paradise for painters.

"A splendid shot, Erceldoune; I congratulate you!" said a voice behind him.

The slayer of the golden eagle turned in surprise; these moors, all barren and profitless though they were, were his, and were rarely trodden by any step except his own.

"Ah! your Grace? Good day. How does the Border come to be honored by a visit from you?"

"Lost my way!" responded his Grace of Glencairne, an inveterate sportsman and a hearty, florid, stalwart man of sixty, clad in a Scotch plaid suit, and looking like a well-to-do North-country farmer. "We're staying with Fitzallayne, and came out after the black game; lost all the rest somehow, and know no more where we are than if we were at the North Pole. You're a godsend. Let me introduce my friends to you; Sir Fulke Erceldoune—Lord Polemore—Mr. Victor Vane."

The beggared gentleman raised his bonnet to the Duke's friends with much such frank soldier-like courtesy as that with which the Border lords, whose blood was in his veins, received Chatelherault and Hamilton in the wild free days of old.

"Shot an eagle, Erceldoune? By George! what a bird," cried the Duke, gazing down amazed and admiring on the murdered monarch.

"I envy you, indeed!" said his companion whom he had named as Victor Vane. "I have shot most things—men

and other birds of prey—but I never killed an eagle, not even in the Hartz or the Engadine."

Erceldoune glanced at him.

"They are rare, and when they do appear we shoot them to insure their scarcity! Perhaps the eagle you would wish to kill is the eagle with two heads? What sport have you had, Duke?"

"Very bad! Birds wild as the——But, God bless my soul, *your* bag's full! I say, we're nearly famished; can't you let us have something to eat at your place yonder?"

"With pleasure, sir, if your Grace can honor an owl's roost, and put up with a plain meal of cold game," said Erceldoune, as he thrust the dead king, with all his pomp of plumage torn and blood-stained, into his bag with the blackcocks, ptarmigan, wild-duck, and snipes.

"My dear fellow! I'll thank you for a crust; I'm literally starving," cried the nobleman, who was pining so wearily for his luncheon that the words "cold game" sounded to him like paradise. "And, by-the-way, if you've any of your father's Madeira left, you might feast an emperor; there wasn't such a wine connoisseur in Europe as Regency Erceldoune."

A shadow swept over the face of the golden eagle's foe as he whistled his dogs, and led the way for his guests over the moor, talking with the Duke. Vane caught the look, and smiled to himself; he thought it was because the ruined gentleman shrank from taking them to his beggared home and his unluxurious table; he erred for once. Such a petty pride was wholly impossible to the bold Border blood of Erceldoune; he would have taken them to a garret quite as cordially as to a mansion; he would have given them, Arab-like, the half of all he had with frank hospitality, if that all had been only an oaten cake, and would never have done himself such mean dishonor as to measure his worth by the weight of his plate, the number of his wines, or the costliness of his soups.

True, the world, he knew well enough, only appraised men by the wealth that was in their pockets; but the world's dictum was not his deity, and with its social heartburnings his own wandering, athletic, adventurous, and

hardy life had never had much to do. He loved the saddle better than the drawing-rooms; and mountain and moorland better than the lust of fame or gold.

It was not more than half a mile to the King's Rest, as the sole relic of the feudal glories of the Border lords was named, from an old tradition dating back to one of Malcolm of Scotland's hunting raids; the place would have maddened an architect or a lover of new stucco, but it would have enraptured an archæologist or an artist. One-half of it was in ruins—a mass of ivy and gray crumbling stone; the other half was of all styles of architecture, from the round quaint tower of the Saxons, to the fantastic, peaked, and oriel window'd Elizabethan. Birds made their nests in most of the chimneys, holly and hawthorn grew out of the clefts in the walls, the terraces were moss-grown, and the escutcheon above the gateway was lost in a profusion of scarlet-leaved creepers. But there were a picturesqueness, a charm, a lingering grandeur which it had still; it spoke of a dead race, and it had poems in every ruin, with the sun on its blazoned casements, and the herons keeping guard by its deserted weed-grown moat.

"God bless my soul! How the place has gone to rack and ruin since I was here twenty years ago!" cried the Duke, heedlessly and honestly, in blank amazement, as he stared about him.

Erceldoune smiled slightly:

"Our fortunes have gone to 'rack and ruin,' Duke."

"Ah, to be sure—yes, to be sure! Sad thing!—sad thing! No fault of yours, though, Erceldoune. Your father shouldn't have been able to touch the entail. He was a——Well, well! he's gone to his account now," said his Grace, pulling himself up short, with a perception that he was on dangerous ground, but continuing to gaze about him with a blank naïveté of astonishment. Men used to call him a "sexagenarian schoolboy;" it was too harsh, for the Duke was a thoroughly good man of business, and a manly and honest friend; but it was true that the simplicity and candor of boyhood clung very oddly to him, and a courtier or a fine gentleman his Grace of Glencairne had never become, though he was not without a frank dignity of his own when roused to it.

By an arched side-door, through a long corridor, they passed into a room in the southern and still habitable portion of the house; a long lofty room, lighted at the end with two magnificent painted windows, paneled with cedar picked out with gold, hung with some half dozen rare pictures, a Titian, two Watteaux, a Teniers, a Van Tol, and a Memlinz, covered with a rich crimson carpeting, now much worn, and with some gold and silver racing and hunting cups on the buffet. The chamber was the relic of the lavish and princely splendor which scarce thirty years ago had been at its height in the King's Rest.

"Ah! dear me—dear me!" murmured the Duke, throwing himself into a fauteuil. "This is the old supper-room! To be sure—how well I remember George IV. sitting just there where you stand. Lord! how fond he was of your father—birds of a feather! Well, well! we might be wild, wicked dogs—we were, sir; but we had witty times of it. Regency Erceldoune was a very brilliant man, though he might be a——"

Erceldoune, with brief courtesy to the Duke, rang the bell impatiently to order luncheon, and turned to the other men:

"I hope your sport and our moorland air may have given you an appetite, for Border larders were never very well stocked, you know, except when the laird made a raid; and, unhappily, there is no 'lifting,' nowadays, to add to our stock!"

"My dear sir!" laughed Vane, dropping his glass, through which he had been glancing at the Van Tol, "half a cold grouse when one is starving is worth all the delicacies of a Carême when one is not *in extremis*. I am delighted to make acquaintance with your highly picturesque and medieval abode; a landscape-painter would be in raptures over it, if you might wish it a trifle more water-proof."

There was a certain dash of condescension and the suspicion of a sneer in the light careless words; if they were intended to wound, however, they missed their mark.

"'Starving on the moors' would not be so very terrific to you if you had been six days in the saddle on a handful of maize, as has chanced to me in the Pampas and the Cor-

dilleras," said Erceldoune, curtly:—there is nothing you "mighty hunter before the Lord," who is known from the Lybian to La Plata, holds in more profound contempt than "small miseries."

"Eh! What? Were you talking about your father's dinners?" broke in his Grace, who, lost in his reveries as his eyes traveled over the familiar chamber, was not very clear what was said. "They were the best in Europe! I have seen Yarmouth, and Alvanley, and Talleyrand, and Charles Dix, and the best epicures we ever had, round that table; I was a very young fellow then, and the dinners were splendid, Erceldoune! He liked to outdo the king, you know, and the king liked to be outdone by him. I don't believe he'd have gone quite the pace he did if it hadn't been for George."

Erceldoune moved impatiently; these latter royal memories connected with the King's Rest were no honor to him; they were so many brands of an extravagant vice, and a madman's ostentation, that had made him penniless, and bought a sovereign's smile with disgrace.

"I dare say, sir. I never knew any use that monarchs were yet, save in some form or another to tax their subjects."

Glencairne laughed: he had not seen much of the man who was now his host, but what he had seen he liked; the Duke abhorred the atmosphere of adulation in which, being a Duke, he was compelled to dwell, and Erceldoune's utter incapability of subservience or flattery refreshed him.

At that moment luncheon was served: the promised cold game in abundance, with some prime venison, some potted char, and a pile of superb strawberries; plain enough, and all the produce of the moorlands round, but accompanied by pure claret, and served on antique and massive plate which had been in the King's Rest for centuries, and was saved out of the total wreck of the Erceldoune fortunes, and at which Lord Polemore looked envyingly; he was of the new creation, and would have given half his broad lands and vast income to have bought that "high and honorable ancientness" which was the only thing gold could not purchase for him.

"You have a feast for the gods, Erceldoune. If this be

Border penury, commend me to it!" cried Glencairne, as he attacked the haunch with a hearty and absorbed attention; like Louis Seize, he would have eaten in the reporter's box at the Assembly while Suleau was falling under twenty sword-thrusts for his sake, and the Swiss Guard were perishing in the Cour Royale.

"I am sure we are infinitely indebted!" murmured Polemore, languidly, gazing at a Venetian goblet given to an Erceldoune by the Queen Regent, Mary of Guise.

"Nay, it is I who am the debtor to a most happy hazard. Try this wine," said Erceldoune, with that stately courtesy which was blent with his frank, *bref*, soldier-like manners; —sociality was not his nature, but cordial hospitality was.

The Duke looked up.

"Eh! Tokay? What, the very wine Leopold gave your father? Tiny bottles? all cobwebbed? *That's* it! The real imperial growth; can't get it for money. Ah! how much have you got of it left?"

"But little—only a dozen or so, I believe; but of what there is I would ask the pleasure of your Grace's acceptance, if the wine find favor with you."

"Favor with me? Hear the man. Why, its Leopold's own growth, I tell you," cried his Grace. "As for giving it away, thank you a thousand times, but I couldn't—I wouldn't rob you of it for anything."

"Indeed I beg you will, my dear Duke," said Erceldoune, with a slight smile. "To a rich man you may refuse what you like, but to a poor man you must leave the pleasure of giving when he can."

"Really, on my soul, you're very good," said the Duke, whose heart was longing after the imperial vintage. "I thank you heartily, my dear fellow; but you're too generous, Erceldoune; give your head away, like all your race! —like all, your race! If your ancestors had had their hands a little less free at giving, and their heads a little longer at their expenditure, you wouldn't have this place all tumble-down as it is about you now!"

"Generosity, if I can ever make claim to it, will not imperil me: Who has nothing can lose nothing," said Erceldoune, briefly. He did not feel particularly grateful for this discussion of his own fortunes and his father's follies

before two strangers, and Vane, noticing this by tact or by chance, glided in with a question admiringly relative to a small gold salver singularly carved and filigreed.

"No, you are quite right, it is not European," answered his host, glad to turn the Duke's remarks off himself, the person he liked least to hear talked of, of any in the world. "It is Mexican. An Erceldoune who was in Cuba at the time Cortes sailed, and who went with him through all the Aztec conquest, brought it home from the famous treasures of Ayaxacotl. He bored a hole in it and slung it round his neck in the passage of the Noche Triste; there is the mark now."

"Very curious!" murmured Polemore, with a sharp twinge of jealousy; he felt it hard that this man, living in an owl's roost on a barren moor, should have had ancestors who were nobles and soldiers in the great Castilian conquest, while he, a viscount and a millionnaire, could not even tell who his fathers were at that era, but knew they had been wool-carders, drawers, butterers, cordwainers, or something horrible and unmentionable!

"Out with Cortes!" echoed Vane. "Then we have a link in common, Sir Fulke. I have some Mexican trifles that one of our family, who was a friend of Velasquez de Leon, brought from the conquest. So a Vane and an Erceldoune fought side by side at Otumba and in the temple of Huitzitopotchli? We must be friends after such an augury?"

Erceldoune bowed in silence, neither accepting nor declining the proffered alliance.

The sunlight poured through the scarlet creepers round the oriel windows into the chamber, on to the red pile of the fruit in its glossy leaves, the rich-hued plumage of the dead birds where they were hastily flung down, the gold and antique plate that was in strange contrast with the simplicity of the fare served on it; and on the dark martial head of the border-laird, where he sat with his great hounds couched about him in attitudes for Landseer. He looked, on the whole, more to belong to those daring, dauntless, fiery, steel-clad Cavaliers of the Cross, who passed with Cortes through the dark belt of porphyry into the sunlit valley of the Venice of the West, than to the present un-

heroic, unadventurous, unmoved, unadmiring age. Near him sat Victor Vane, a man of not more than thirty years, rather under the middle size and slightly built; in his bearing easy and aristocratic, in feature, although not by any means handsome, very attractive, with blue eyes that were always smiling with pleasant sunshine, hair of the lightest hue that glanced like silk, and a mouth as delicate as a woman's, that would have made him almost effeminate but for the long amber moustaches that shaded it, while his face, though very fair, was perfectly colorless, which lent to it the delicacy, but also the coldness, of marble.

As the two men sat together—host and guest—antagonism seemed more likely between them than alliance; and in such antagonism, if it arose, it would have been hard to say which would be the victor. In a fair and open fight, hand to hand, the blood of the Northern Countrie would be sure of conquest, and Erceldoune would gain it with the same ease and the same strength as that with which those in whose veins it had run before him had charged "through and through a stand of pikes," and stood the shock of the English lances; but in a combat of finesse, in a duel of intrigue, where the hands were tied from a bold stroke, and all the intricate moves were made in the dark, it would be a thousand to one that the bright and delicate Southron stiletto would be too subtle for the straight stroke and dauntless chivalry of the stalwart Border steel.

At that moment a dispatch was handed to Erceldoune by the single servant who lived in the King's Rest, and served him when he was there. The letter was sealed with the royal arms, and marked "On her Majesty's Service." Its contents were but two lines:

"Sir Fulke Erceldoune on service immediately. Report to-morrow by 11 A.M. at F. O."

"From the office?" asked the Duke, as his host tossed the dispatch aside.

"Yes. On service immediately. East Europe, I dare say."

"Ah! the Cabinet brewing more mischief with their confounded pedagogue's pettifogging, I will bet!" cried his Grace. (The existing Government was his pet foe.) "When are you ordered?"

"To-morrow. I shall take the night express, so I shall not need to leave here till midnight," answered Erceldoune, to set at rest any fears his guests might feel that they detained him. "I wish they had sent Buller or Phil Vaughan; I wanted a month more of the deer and the blackcock; but I must console myself with the big game in Wallachia, if I can find time."

"You serve her Majesty?" inquired Vane, who knew it well enough, as he knew all the State messengers in Europe.

"The F. O., rather," laughed Erceldoune. "Salaried to keep in saddle! Paid to post up and down the world with a State bag honored with Havanas, and a dispatch-box marked 'Immediate,' and filled with char, chocolate, or caviare!"

"Come, come, Erceldoune, that's too bad!" laughed the Duke.

"Not a whit, sir! I went out to New York last year with royal bags imposing enough to contain the freedom of Canada, or instructions to open an American war, but which had nothing in the world in them save a dinner-service for his Excellency, and some French novels and Paris perfumes for the First Secretary."

The Duke laughed:

"Well, that will hardly be the case now. Matters are getting very serious eastward; everywhere over there the people are ripe for revolt; I expect Venetia, and Galicia, and Croatia, and all the rest of them, are meditating a rising together. I happen to know those bags you take out will contain very important declarations from us; the Cabinet intend to send instructions to invite Turkey, command her rather, to——"

"My dear Duke, it is not for me to know *what* I take out; it is sufficient that I deliver it safely," laughed Erceldoune, to check the outpourings of his Grace's garrulous tongue. "I am no politician and diplomatist, as you know well. I prefer hard riding to soft lying in either sense of the word."

"Wish everybody else did!" said the Duke. "If men would keep to their own concerns and live as they ought, with plenty of sport and fresh air, everything would go

smoothly enough. There'd be no marring or meddling then; as for this Cabinet, it's just what Clarendon said of Bristol: 'For puzzling and spoiling a thing, there was never his equal.' If the dispatches you will carry to Moldavia don't embroil Europe, it won't be his fault, but there'll be sure to be a postcript to 'em all, meaning, 'N.B. In no case will *we* fight!'"

"Who is severe now, Duke? On my honor, you will make me feel as if I were Discord incarnate flying over Europe with her firebrand. I never took so poetic a side of the service before."

He strove to arrest the reckless course of incautious revelations of the intentions in high places, but it was useless. The Scotch Duke was off on the Foreign Office ill-deeds, and no power could have stopped him; no power did until he had fairly talked himself hoarse, when he drank a deep glass of claret, and rose, with reiterated thanks for his impromptu entertainment as sincere as they were voluble, and with cordial invitation to his castle of Benithmar, a stately pile upon the Clyde.

"And I hope you will allow me also to return your hospitalities in kind," said Vane, with his brightest smile. "Since you have the mania of *pérégrinomanie*, as Guy Patin calls it, and are always going up and down Europe, you must pass continually through Paris. I can only hope, both there and in Naples, you will very soon allow me the pleasure of showing you how much I hold myself the debtor both for the hospitality of to-day, and the acquaintance to which it has been so fortunate for me as to lead."

Erceldoune bent his head, and thanked him courteously but briefly—he had no love for honeyed speeches—and offered them, as a modern substitute for the stirrup-cup, some cigars of purest flavor, brought over by himself from the West Indies.

"How does Mr. Vane come in your Grace's society?" he asked the Duke, as he accompanied them across his own moor to put them *en route* for Lord Fitzallayne's, the two others having fallen slightly behind them.

"How? Eh? Why—I don't know—because he's staying at Fitz's, to be sure."

"Staying there!"

"Yes. Fitz swears by him, and all the women are in love with him, though he's a pale insignificant face, to my thinking. What do you know of him? Anything against him—eh?"

"Sufficiently *about* him to advise you, if you will allow me, not to let him glean from you the private intentions and correspondence of the ministry, or any instructions they may have given their representatives abroad. Only talk to him on such matters generally; say no more to him than what the public knows."

"What? Ah! indeed. I apprehend you. I thank you, sir—I thank you," said his Grace, hurriedly, conscious that he had been somewhat indiscreet, but curious as any old gossip in a Bréton knitting and spinning gossipry. "But he stands very well; he comes of good blood, I think. He is a gentleman; you meet him at the best Courts abroad.".

"Possibly."

"Then what the deuce is there against him?"

"I am not aware that I said there was anything. Simply, I know his character; I know he is an adventurer—a political adventurer—associated with the ultra parties in Italy and Hungary. I do not think his social status is anything very remarkable, and I repeat my advice; do not take him into political confidence."

"If the man can't be trusted, the man's a blackguard!"

"My dear Duke! *la haute politique* will not admit of such simplifications. A man may be a great man, a great minister, a great patriot, but all the same he may be—politically speaking—a great cheat! Indeed, is there a statesman who is not one?"

"True, true—uncomfortably true," growled his Grace; "but of Victor Vane—what's there against him? What do you know—what would you imply?"

"I 'imply' nothing; it is the most cowardly word in the language. I know very little, and that little I have said to place your Grace on your guard; and it is no secret; Mr. Vane is well known abroad to be the determinate foe of Austria, and to be widely involved in political intrigues. Of his career I know no further; and of what

I have said he is welcome to hear every word," said Erceldoune, with a dash of decision and impatience, while he paused and pointed to a road running round a bend of gray gorse-covered rock beside a brown and rapid moor stream, which would lead them to a short cut across the fells homeward.

There they parted in the bright warm August afternoon, as the sun began to sink toward the westward; his guests soon lost to sight behind the wild woodland growth of the half savage glen, while the last of the Border lords turned backward to his solitary and ruined homestead, sweeping over the heather with the easy swinging step of the bred mountaineer, followed by his brace of staghounds and two black and tan setters.

"Salaried to keep in saddle! Paid to post up and down Europe!" he had said, with a certain disdain, for Erceldoune was nothing more or less than a Queen's messenger; a State courier, bound to serve at a State summons; holding himself in readiness for Russia or Teheran, for ice-fields or sun-scorched tropics, for the swamps of Mexico or the rose plains of Persia, at a second's notice. But he suited the life, and the life suited him; for he was a keen sportsman, and the first rider in Europe; was equally at his ease in an Arab camp and a Paris café, in a Polish snow-storm, with the wolves baying in wrath and famine about the sleigh, and in the chancellérie of a British plenipotentiary over the dainty dishes of a First Secretary's dinner; and had an iron constitution, a frame steeled to all changes of climate or inroads of fatigue, and that coolness under close peril, and utter indifference to personal indulgence, which made him renowned in the messenger service, and as much at home in the Desert as a Sheikh. Indeed, the Desert life could not have been bolder, and freer, and simpler than that which Erceldoune had led from his boyhood, partly from nature, partly from habit; he had as much of the barbaric chief in him as he had of the man of the world.

His father—Regency Erceldoune, as he was called, from his alliance with "the mad Prince and Poynings"—had been a gambler, a debauchee, and a drunkard, though a

gentleman with it all. Such orgies as George Rex had at the Cross Deep, his friend and favorite had at King's Rest, mad, witty, riotous, and shameless as the worst days of lascivious Rome. Lands and money went in them till there were neither left; and his son, brought to them and taught them while he was nothing but a child, had sickened of the vice in which he was steeped as thoroughly as, had he been brought up by precisians, he would have craved and loved it. He saw men leveled with brutes, and made far more bestial than the beasts; and his nature reared itself out of the slough, and refused the slavery of sensuality. If he were too early contaminated, he was all the earlier revolted.

When he was twenty-two his father died; and he was left the last Master of King's Rest (by the old title long dropped in desuetude), with some miles of moorland and a beggared fortune, not a single relative, and not a chance of a career. A certain wild and witty peer, who had been prominent in the orgies of the Roissy of the Border—saying nothing to him, for the Erceldoune stock was famous for a pride, which perished rather than bend—got him offered a messengership; and his first meeting with officials at the Foreign Office was characteristic, and had not a little influence on his career. In the Board-room, at the hour when he was being received by those sleepy and solemn personages the Heads of a Department, there lounged in a minister, as celebrated for his cheery and facetious humor as for his successful and indomitable statesmanship; for his off-hand good nature as for his foreign policies. The Heads bowed submissive before my lord; my lord gave his rapid, lucid orders, and, as he was lounging out again, put up his eye-glass at Erceldoune.

"Messengership? We've too many messengers already," he said, cutting in two the reply of the Board to his interrogation. "Only ride over one another's way, and lose half the bags among them. Who are you, sir?"

"Fulke Erceldoune," said the Border lord, with no birthright but some barren acres of heather, returning the great Minister's stare as calmly and as haughtily; insolence he would not have brooked from an emperor.

"Erceldoune! God bless my soul, your father and I

were like brothers once," said his lordship, breaking off his sharp autocratic cross-examination for the *sans façon* good-hearted familiarity of tone, most usual and congenial to him. "Not a very holy fraternity either! Monks of Medmenham! Who sent you up for a messengership? Lord Longbourn? Ah! very happy to appoint you. Go in for your examination as soon as you like."

"I thank you, my lord, no. You have said, 'You have too many messengers already.'"

The minister stared a minute, and then laughed.

"Pooh, pooh! Never mind what I said! If you're like what your father was, you won't complain of a sinecure."

The boy-master of King's Rest bowed to the cabinet counselor.

"I am *not* what he was; and I do not take money from the State, if the State do not need my services. I did not come here to seek a pension!"

The great statesman stared at him a second with a blank amazement; his condescension had never met with such a rebuff and such a scruple in all his length of years and of office. The grave and reverend Heads that bent to the earth in docility and servility before the Foreign Secretary, gazed at the offender with such horror of reprobation as the members of the Inquisition might have bestowed on a blasphemer who had reviled the Host and rebelled against the Holy See. Erceldoune stood his ground calmly and indifferently; he had said simply what he meant, and, in the pride of his youth and his ruin, he was grandly careless whether he had closed the door of every career upon himself, and condemned himself to starve for life on his profitless acres of tarne and gorse.

The Minister looked at him, with his keen blue eyes reading the boy through and through; then a rich humor lighted up their glittering azure light, and he laughed aloud—a mellow, ringing, Irish mirth, that startled all the drowsy echoes and pompous stillness of Downing Street.

"You hit hard and straight, my young Sir Fulke! Very dangerous habit, sir, and very expensive: get rid of it! Go before the commissioners to-morrow, and pass your examination. I'll give you an attachéship, if you like

it better, but I don't think you'll do for diplomacy! I shall see you again. Good day to you."

The Minister nodded, and left the Board-room with as much dash and lightness in his step when he ran down stairs, as if he were still a Harrow boy; and, in that two minutes' interview in the Foreign Office, Erceldoune had made a friend for life in one who—if he had a short political memory, and took up policies, or treaties, and dropped them again with a charming facility and inconstancy, as occasion needed—was adored by every man he employed, and was as loyal to his personal friendships as he was staunch to his personal promises.

True to his word, he gave Erceldoune his choice of an attachéship, a messengership, a commission, or one of those fashionable and cozy appointments in Downing Street where younger sons and patrician protégés yawn, make their race books, discuss the points of demi-reps and rosières, circulate the last epigram round the town, manufacture new and sublimated liqueur recipes, and play at baccarat or chicken hazard in the public service. Erceldoune took the messengership; from a motive which strongly colored his character and career even then—honor.

His father, deep in a morass of embarrassments, had lived like a prince of the blood; his son had taken, in sheer revulsion, an utter abhorrence of all debt. He had been steeped in dissolute vices and lawless principles from his earliest years; and the mere wildness of men of his own years looked childish, and was without charm, beside the orgies through which he had passed his novitiate while yet in his youngest boyhood. He had seen men of richest wit, highest powers, brightest talents, noblest blood, suddenly disappear into darkness and oblivion, to drag on an outlawed life in some wretched continental town, through that deadly curse of usury, which had given their heritage to the Hebrews, and let them glitter leaders of fashion for a decade, only to seize their lives more surely at the last; and he had sworn never to give his own life over to the keeping of that vampire which lulls us into an opium-like dream for one short hour, to drain our best blood drop by drop with its brute fangs and its insatiate thirst. Had he

gone into the army, where his own wishes would have led him, or had he taken one of the diplomatic or civil fashionable appointments offered him, the circles into which he would have been thrown must have flung him into debt, and into every temptation to it, however he might have resisted; he must have lived as those about him lived; the mere bare necessities of his position would have entailed embarrassments from which the liberty of his nature revolted as from a galley-slave's fetters. In Erceldoune's creed a landless gentleman was worthy of his blood so long as he was free—no longer.

Therefore he entered the messenger service; and, on the whole, the life, which he had now led for about a score of years, suited him as well as any, save a soldier's, could have done; the constant travel, the hard riding, the frequent peril, the life of cities alternating with the life of adventure—these were to his taste. And while in the capitals of Europe there was not a woman who could beguile, or a man who could fool him, the Mexican guachos found in him a rider fleet and fearless as themselves; the French Zéphyrs knew in him a volunteer, fiery, and elastic as any their battalions held; the fishers of Scandinavia had lived with him through many a blinding icy midnight sea-storm; the Circassians had feasted and loved him in their mighty mountain strongholds; and the Bedaweens welcomed as one of themselves the Frank, who rode as they rode, without heeding the scorch of the brazen skies and sands; who could bring down a vulture on the wing whirling right betwixt his sight and the burning sun, a black speck on the yellow glare; who could live like themselves, if needs be, on a draught of water and a handful of maize or of dates, and who cared for no better bed than their desert solitudes, with his saddle beneath his head, and the desert stars shining above.

Love he had known little of; no human life had ever become necessary to his, or ever obtained the slightest sway over, or hold upon, his own; in this he was exceptionally fortunate. What were dear to him were those profitless, useless moorland wastes of heath and heron-creeks, of yellow gorse, and brown still pools, the sole relics of his barren Border heritage, and which self-denial and renunciation had kept free from claim or burden.

The sun was shining full on the King's Rest as he returned, and he leaned over the low gate of the stable entrance, looking at the ivy-hidden ruins, which were all which remained to him of the possessions of a race that had once been as great as the Hamilton, the Douglas, or the Græme, and of which an empty title alone was left him, as though to make his poverty and its decay more marked. These did not often weigh on him; he cared little for riches, or for what they brought; and in the adventure and the vigor of a stirring wandering life there were a richness of coloring and a fullness of sensation which, together with a certain simplicity of taste and habit that was natural to himself, prevented the pale hues and narrow lines of impoverished fortunes from having place or note. But now the Duke's words had recalled them; and he looked at the King's Rest with more of melancholy than his dauntless and virile nature often knew. There, over the lofty gateway, where the banner of a great feudal line had floated, the scarlet leaves of the Virginian parasite alone were given to the wind. In the moat, where on many a summer night the night riders had thundered over the bridge to scour hill and dale with the Warden of the Marches, there were now but the hoot of the heron, the nests of the water-rat, and the thick growth of sedges and water-lilies. In the chambers where James IV. had feasted, and Mary Stuart rested, and Charles Edward found his loyalest friends and safest refuge, the blue sky shone through the open rafters, and the tattered tapestry trembled on the walls, and the fox and the bat made their coverts; the grand entrance, the massive bastions, the stately towers which had been there when the bold Border chieftains rode out to join the marching of the clans, had vanished like the glories of Alnaschar's dream, all that remained to tell their place a mound of lichen-covered ruin, with the feathery grasses waving in the breeze;—it was the funeral pile of a dead race.

And the last of their blood, the last of their title, stood looking at it in the light of the setting sun with a pang at his heart.

"Well! better so than built up with dishonored gold! The power and the pomp are gone, but the name at least

is stainless," thought Fulke Erceldoune, as he looked away from the dark and shattered ruins of his heritage, across the moorland, golden with its gorse, and toward the free and sunlit distance of the seas, stretching far and wide.

CHAPTER II.

HAVING BROKEN HIS BREAD.

"WHAT did you think of that man?" said Lord Polemore to Victor Vane that evening over his coffee in the drawing-rooms, out of the Duke's hearing.

"Think of him? think of him? Well!—I think he will die a violent death."

"Good gracious!" said the peer, with a little shiver. Why?"

"I never analyze!" laughed Victor, softly. "I think so,—because I think so. He will get shot in a duel, perhaps, for saying some barbaric truth or other in the teeth of policy."

"Who is that you are prophesying for with such charmingly horrible romance?" asked a very pretty woman.

"Fellow we met on the moor," answered Polemore. "Queer fellow! Beggar, you know,—holes in the carpets, rats in the rooms,—and yet, on my honor, Venice goblets and Mexican gold! Absurd!"

"What! a beggar with holes in his coat and rats in his pockets with Venice glass and Mexican ingots!" cried the beautiful blonde, who had been listening languidly.

"No, no! Not *that* sort of beggar, you know," interposed the peer. "Man that lives in a lot of ruins. Messenger fellow—lunched with him to-day. Wretched place; only fit for bats; no household, no cook, no anything; odious dungeon! And yet, on my word, if the fellow isn't ridiculous enough to serve up his dry bread on gold salvers, and pour his small beer into Cinque Cento glasses!"

"Come! we had very fair wine considering it was a Barmecide's feast," laughed Vane.

"Height of absurdity, you know!" went on Polemore, waxing almost eloquent under the spurs of the twinges of envy he had felt while at luncheon. "Fancy, Lady Augusta! here's a man nothing but a courier, he says himself, always racing up and down Europe with bags; so hard up that he has to shoot for himself everything that he eats, and living in a wretched rat-hole I wouldn't turn a dog into; yet keeps gold and silver things fit for a prince, and tells you bombastical stories about his ancestors having been caciques of Mexico! For my part, I don't doubt he stole them all!"

"Bravo! Bravissimo!" laughed Victor Vane. "And what is much more, Lady Augusta, this Border savage wears deer-skins in the rough, 'lifts' cattle when the moon's dark, and has a fricassee of young children boiling in a cauldron. Quite *â l'antique*, you see!"

"But who *is* the creature?" asked the lady, a little bewildered, a little interested, and a good deal amused.

"Oh—let me see—ah! he calls himself Fulke Erceldoune," said Polemore, with an air of never having heard the title, and of having strong reasons for believing it a false one.

A man standing near turned at the name.

"Fulke? You are talking of Fulke Erceldoune? Best fellow in the world, and has the handsomest strain of black-tan Gordon setters, bred on the Regent and Rake cross, going anywhere."

"Oh—ah—do you know him, then?" murmured Polemore, a little discomfited.

"Rather! First steeple-chaser in the two countries; tremendous pots always on him. Know him!—ask the Shire men. Saved my life, by-the-way, last year—fished me out of the Gulf of Spezzia, when I was all but spent; awful tempest at the time; very nearly drowned himself. Is he here, do you say?"

"He's at that wretched rat-hole of his," grumbled Polemore, sorely in wrath.

"King's Rest? Didn't know that. Go and see him to-morrow."

"What remarkably conflicting statements!" murmured Lady Augusta, with languid amusement. "A beggar and a savage!—a preux chevalier and a paladin of chivalry! Singular combination this—what is it?—Fulke Erceldoune."

"Nay," laughed Vane, "it was a combination common enough in the old days of chivalry, and our friend seems to me better suited to the Cinque Cento than the present century. Just the sort of man to have been a Knight Templar with Cœur de Lion, or an adventurer with Pizarro, with no capital and no credit but his Toledo blade."

"Trash!" said the absent man's defender, with impatient disdain that almost roused him into energy, "Erceldoune is a splendid fellow, Lady Augusta. I only wish you could see him ride to hounds. In saddle; in sport; on a yacht deck in a storm; with any big game you like—pigs, bisons, tigers; swimming in the Turkish waters in mid-winter; potting lions with the Kabyles and the Zouaves—put him where you will, he's never at a loss, never beaten, and can do more than twenty men put together. Dash and science, you know; when you get the two together, they always win. As for money—all the good old names are impoverished now, and it's the traders only who have any gilding."

With which fling at Polemore—whose fathers were of the Cottonocracy—the champion, something disgusted at having been entrapped into such a near approach to anything like interest and excitement, turned away, and began to murmur pretty nothings, in the silkiest and sleepiest of tones, into the ear of a Parisian marquise.

"Extreme readiness to break your neck, and extreme aptitude for animal slaughter, always appear to be the English criterion of your capabilities and your cardinal virtues," murmured Vane, with his low light laugh, while Polemore, sulkily aggrieved, muttered to himself:

"Man that's a beggar to keep Mexican things and have his bare bones served up on gold dishes—ridiculous, preposterous! If he's so poor, he must be in debt; and if he's in debt he ought to sell them, out of common honesty. Cheats his creditors—clearly cheats his creditors!"

And so—having broken his bread and eaten his salt—they talked of him: there are a few rude nomad Arab vir-

tues that have died out with civilization; and the Sheikh will keep faith and return your hospitalities better than Society.

That evening, a Dalmatian, who was the body-servant of Victor Vane, a very polished and confidentially useful person, rode over to the little station nearest Lord Fitzallayne's, and sent a telegram, which he read from a slip of paper, to Paris. It ran thus, save that it was in a polyglot jumble of languages which would have defied any translation without a key:

"The Border Eagle flies eastward. Clip the last feather of the wing. Only La Picciola. Idalia or pearls of lead, as you like. Take no steps till beyond the King's. Then make sure, even if——White coats in full muster; Crescent horns up; Perfide, as usual, brags but won't draw. N.B. The Eagle will give you beak and talons."

Which, simply translated, meant—

"Erceldoune, Queen's Courier, will take the F. O. bags into the Principalities. Relieve him of the last dispatches he has with him. We only want the smallest bag. I leave you to choose how to manage this; either with a successful intrigue or a sure rifle-shot. Do not stop him till he is beyond Turin. Secure the papers, even if you have to take his life to get them. The Austrians are in strong force everywhere; matters in Turkey, as regards the Principalities, are against us; England, as usual, bullies, but will not be drawn into a war. N.B. This Erceldoune will give you trouble, and fight hard."

And being translated by the recipient in all its intricacies of implication and command, would mean far more.

The tired telegraph clerk, who yawned and did nothing all day long in the little out-of-the-world Border station, save when he sent a message for the lodge to town, rubbed his heavy eyes, stared, told off the jumbled Babel of phrases with bewildered brain, and would barely have telegraphed them all in due order and alphabet but for the dextrous care of the Dalmatian.

While the message was being spelled out, the night-express dashed into the station, with red lamps gleaming through the late moonless night, and its white steam cloud flung far out on the gloom, flashing on its way from Edin-

burgh across the Border land,—a tall man, dressed in a dark loose coat of soft Canadian furs, with a great cheroot in his mouth, ran up the station stairs, and threw down his gold:

"First class to town;—all right."

He took his ticket, flung open a door of an unoccupied carriage, and he threw himself into a seat with the rapidity of one used never to idle time and never to be kept waiting by others, and the train, with a clash and a clang, darted out into the darkness, plunging down into the gloom as into the yawning mouth of Avernus, its track faintly told by the wraith-like smoke of the wreathing steam and the scarlet gleam of the signal-lamps.

The Dalmatian had looked after him with some curiosity:

"Who is that?" he asked the clerk.

"Erceldoune, of the King's Rest. He is a Queen's messenger, you know, always rushing about at unearthly times, like a wandering Jew. I say, what the dickens is that word; Arabic, ain't it?"

The Dalmatian, with a smile, looked after the train, then turned and spelt out the words.

"Such gibberish! If that ain't a rum start somehow or other, I'm a Dutchman," thought the telegraphist, with a yawn, returning to his dog-eared green-covered shilling novel, relating the pungent adventures of a soiled dove of St. John's Wood, and showing beyond all doubt—if anybody ever doubted it yet—that virtue, after starving on three-halfpence a shirt, will be rewarded with pneumonia and the parish shell, while vice eats her truffles, drinks her wines, and retires with fashionable toilets, and a competence, to turn repentant and respectable at leisure. Meanwhile, the night-express rushed on through silent hills, and sleeping hamlets, over dark water-pools and through bright gaslit cities, and above head the electric message flashed, outstripping steam, and flying, like a courier of the air, toward France before the man it menaced.

With noon on the morrow the best-known messenger in the service reported himself at the Foreign Office, received dispatches for Paris, Turin, and Jassy, and started with the F. O. bags as usual express.

Had any prophet told him that as he lay back in the mail train, with a curled silver Eastern pipe coming out of

his waving beard, and papers of critical European import in the white bags lying at his feet, Chance was drifting him at its wanton caprice as idly and as waywardly as the feathery smoke it floated down on the wind, Erceldoune would have contemptuously denied that Chance could ever affect a life justly balanced and rightly held in rein. He would have said Chance was a deity for women, fatalists, and fools; a Fetish worshiped by the blind. The Border chiefs of the King's Rest had believed in the might of a strong arm and in the justice cleft by a long two-edged sword, and had left weaklings to bow to Hazard:—and the spirit of their creed was still his.

Yet he might have read a lesson from the death of the moorland eagle;—one chance shot from the barrel hid in the heather, and power, strength, liberty, keen sight, and lordly sovereignty of solitude were over, and the king-bird reeled and fell!

But to draw the parable would not have been at all like his vigorous nature;—a State courier has not much habitude or taste for oriental metaphors and highly-spiced romances, and he had too much of the soldier, the Shikari, the man of the world and the Arab combined, to leave him anything whatever of the poet or the dreamer. Men of action may have grave, but they never have visionary thoughts, and life with Erceldoune was too gallant, strong, and rapid a stream—ever in incessant motion, though calm enough, as deep waters mostly are—to leave him leisure or inclination to loiter lingeringly or dreamily upon its banks. Reflection was habitual to him, imagination was alien to him.

By midnight he reached Paris, and left his dispatches at the English Embassy. There was no intense pressure of haste to get Turin-wards so long as he was in the far Eastern Principalities by the Friday, and he waited for the early mail train to the South, instead of taking a special one, as he would otherwise have done, to get across the Alps. If a few hours were left under own his control in a city, Erceldoune never slept them away; he slept in a railway carriage, a traveling carriage, on deck, in a desert, on a raft rushing down some broad river that made the only highway through Bulgarian or Roumelian forests—any-

where where novelty, discomfort, exposure, or danger would have been likely to banish sleep from most men; but in a city he neglected it with an independence of that necessity of life which is characteristic of the present day. There is a café, whether in the Rue Lafitte, Rivoli, Castiglione, or La Paix, matters not; here, in the great gilded salon, with its innumerable mirrors and consoles and little oval tables, or in the little cabinets, with their rosewood and gilding, and green velvet and rose satin, if there be a bouquet to be tossed down on the marble slab, and the long eyes of a Laura or Agläe to flash over the wines, while a pretty painted fan taps an impatient rataplan or gives a soft blow on the ear—may be found after midnight a choice but heterogeneous gathering. Secretaries of all the legations, Queen's messengers, Charivari writers, Eastern travelers, great feuilletonists, great artists, princes if they have any wit beneath their purples, authors of any or all nations—all, in a word, that is raciest, wittiest, and, in their own sense, most select in Paris, are to be met with at the Café Minuit, if you be of the initiated. If you be not, you may enter the café of course, since it is open to all the world, and sup there off what you will, but you will still remain virtually outside it.

Erceldoune was well known here: it is in such republics only that a man is welcomed for what he is, and what he has done—not for what he is worth. He was as renowned in Paris because he was so utterly unlike the Parisians, as he was renowned in the East because he so closely resembled the Arabs; and he entered the Café Minuit for the few hours which lay between his arrival at the Embassy and his departure for Turin.

None of his own special set had dropped in just then; indeed, there were but few of them in Paris. As he sat at his accustomed table, glancing through a journal, and with the light from the gaselier above shed full on his face—a face better in unison with drooping desert-palms, and a gleaming stand of rifles, and the dusky glow of a deep sunset on Niger or on Nile, for its setting and background, than with the gilt arabesques and florid hues and white gaslight of a French café—a new-comer, who had entered shortly afterward and seated himself at the same table,

addressed him on some topic of the hour, and pushed him an open case of some dainty scented cigarettes.

Erceldoune courteously declined them; he always smoked his own Turkish tobacco, and would as soon have used cosmetiques as perfumed cigars; and answering the remark, looked at the speaker. He was accustomed to read men thoroughly and rapidly, even if they carried their passports in cipher. What he saw opposite him was a magnificently made man, with a face of most picturesque and brilliant beauty, of a purely foreign type, with the eyes long, dark, and melting, and features perfectly cut as any cameo's—a man who might have sat to a painter for Lamoral d'Egmont, or for one of Fra Moreale's reckless nobly-born Free Lances; and might have passed for five-and-thirty at the most, till he who should have looked closely at the lines in the rich reckless beauty, and caught a certain look in the lustrous half-veiled eyes, would have allotted him, justly, fifteen full years more.

Erceldoune gave him one glance, and though there was little doubt about his type and his order, he had known men of both by the hundreds.

"Paris is rather empty, monsieur? Sapristi! The asphalte in August would be too much for a salamander," pursued the stranger, over his bouillabaisse. He spoke excellent French, with a mellifluous southern accent, not of France.

Erceldoune assented. Like all travelers or men used to the world, he liked a stranger full as well as a friend for a companion—perhaps rather the better; but he was naturally silent, and seldom spoke much, save when strongly moved or much prepossessed by those whom he conversed with; then he would be eloquent enough, but that was rare.

"Thousands come to Paris this time of the year, but only to pass through it, as I dare say you are doing yourself, monsieur?" went on the Greek, if such he were, as Erceldoune judged him by the eyes and the features, worthy of Phidias's chisel, rarely seen without some Hellenic blood.

"For the season the city is tolerably full; travelers keep it so, as you say," answered Erceldoune, who was never to be entrapped into talking of himself.

"It is a great mistake for people to travel in flocks, like swallows and sheep," said his vivacious neighbor, whose manners were very careless, graceful, and thoroughly polished, if they had a dash of the Bohemian, the Adventurer, and the Free Lance. "A terrible mistake! Overcrowds the inns, the steamers, and the railway carriages; thins the soups, doubles the price of wines, and teaches guides to look on themselves as luxuries, to be paid for accordingly; makes a Nile sunset ridiculous by being witnessed by a mob; and turns Luxor and Jupiter Ammon into dust and prose by having a tribe of donkeys and dragomen rattled over their stones! A fearful mistake! If you are social and gregarious, stay in a city; but if you are speculative and Ishmaelesque, travel in solitude. Eh, monsieur?"

"If you can find it. But you have to travel far to get into solitudes in these days. Have you seen this evening's *Times?*"

"A thousand thanks! Wonderful thing, your *Times!* Does the work in England that secret police do in Vienna, spies and bayonets do here, and confetti to the populace and galleys to the patriots do in Rome."

"Scarcely! The *Times* would rather say it prevents England's having need of any of those continental arguments," said Erceldoune, as he tossed the brandy into his coffee.

The other laughed, as from under his lashes he flashed a swift glance at the Queen's Messenger. He would have preferred it if there had been less decision about the broad, bold, frank brow, and less power in the length of limb stretched out, and the supple wrist as it lay resting on the marble slab of the café table.

"Basta! Governments should give the people plenty to eat and plenty to laugh at; they would never be troubled with insurrections then, or hear anything more about 'liberty!' A sleek, well-fed, happy fellow never turned patriot yet; he who takes a dagger for his country only takes it because he has no loaf of bread to cut with it, or feels inclined to slit his own throat! Make corn and meat cheap, and you may play tyrant as you like."

"A sound policy, and a very simple one."

"All sound things are simple, monsieur! It is the sham and rotten ones that want an intricate scaffolding to keep them from falling; the perfect arch stands without girders. 'Panem et Circenses' will always be the first article of good governments; when the people are in good humor they never seethe into malcontents."

"Then I suppose you would hold that cheap provisions and low taxes would make us hear no more of the present cry of 'nationalities'?" His companion was piquant in his discourse and polished in his style, but he did not particularly admire him; and when he did not admire people, he had a way of holding them at arm's length.

"'Nationalities?' Ridiculous prejudices! Myths that would die to-morrow, only ministers like to keep a handy reason on the shelf to make a raid on their neighbor, or steal an inch or two of frontier when the spirit moves them," laughed the other, and his laugh was a soft silvery chime, very pleasant to the ear. "Pooh! a man's nationalities are where he gets the best wage and the cheapest meat, specially in these prosaic profoundly-practical times, when there is no chivalry, no dash, no color; when the commonplace thrives; when we turn Egyptian mummies into railway fuel, and find Pharaoh's dust make a roaring fire; when we make crocuses into veratrin for our sore-throats, and violets into sweet-meats for our eating! A detestable age, truly. Fancy the barbarism of crystallizing and crunching a violet! The flower of Clémence Isaure, and all the poets after her, condemned to the degradation of becoming a bonbon! Can anything be more typical of the prosaic atrocity of this age? Impossible!"

"With such acute feelings, you must find the dinner-card excessively restricted. With so much sympathy for a violet, what must be your philanthropy for a pheasant!" said Erceldoune, quietly, who was not disposed to pursue the Monody of a Violet in the Café Minuit, though the man to a certain extent amused him.

At that moment the foreigner rose a little hastily, left his ice-cream unfinished, and, with a gay, graceful adieu, went out of the salon, which was now filling. "A handsome fellow, and talks well," thought Erceldoune, wring-

ing the amber Moselle from his long moustaches, when he was left alone at the marble table in the heat, and light, and movement of the glittering café. "I know the fraternity well enough, and he is one of the best of the members, I dare say. He did not waste much of his science on me; he saw it would be profitless work. On my word, the wit and ability and good manners those men fritter away in their order would make them invaluable in a Chancellerie and fit them for any State office in the world."

The First Secretary of the English Legation and a French diplomatist entered and claimed his attention at that instant, and he gave no more thought to the champion of the crystallized violets, whom, justly or wrongly as it might chance, he had classed with the renowned Legion of Chevaliers d'Industrie, and whose somewhat abrupt departure he had attributed either to his own lack of promise as a plausible subject for experimentalizing upon, or to the appearance on the scene of some *mouchard* of the Secret Bureau, whom the vivacious bewailer of the fate of sugared flowers in this age of prose did not care to encounter.

Erceldoune thought no more of him then and thenceforward; he would have thought more had the mirrors of the Café Minuit been Paracelsus's or Agrippa's mirours of grammarye.

The long console-glass, with its curled gas-branches and its rose-hewed draperies, and its reflex of the gilding, the glitter, the silver, the damask, the fruit, the wines, and the crowds of the Paris café, would have been darkened with night-shadows and deep forest foliage, and the tumult of close struggles for life or death, and the twilight hush of cloistered aisles, and the rich glow of Eastern waters, and the silent gloom of ancient God-forgotten cities; and, from out the waving, shadowy, changing darkness of all, there would have looked a woman's face, with fathomless, luminous eyes, and hair with a golden light upon it, and a proud, weary, sorceress smile on the lips—the face of a temptress or of an angel?

But the mirror had no magic of the future; the glass reflected nothing save the gas-jets of the ormolu sconces,

and Fulke Erceldoune sat there in Paris that night, drinking his iced Rhine wines, and smoking his curled Arabian meerschaum, knowing nothing of what lay before him, a blind wanderer in the twilight, a traveler in strange countries, as we are at best in life.

CHAPTER III.

SOUFFRIR EN ROI.

HEAVEN forbid that the Principalities should be better governed: they would be like all the rest of the world in no time. They may be ruinous to themselves very probably, and a nest of internecine discord for Eastern Europe; but they are delightful for the stranger, and the bird of passage should surely have one solitude left wherein to find rest; regions where the refined tortures of the post cannot reach; where debts can be defied and forgotten across the stretch of those dense pine-woods which sever you from the rest of mankind; where the only highway to your quarters is a rapid surging river, with a timber-raft drifting down it; where, whirled along by gipsy horses and gipsy drivers through vast wooded tracks, you halt and wake with a pleasant wonder to find yourself in the broad streets and squares of a populous city, of which, though you are not more geographically ignorant than your brethren, you had not the haziest notion, and whose very name you do not know when you hear it, waking at the cessation of the horses' gallop and the gipsy Jehu's shouts, to open your eyes upon the clear Moldavian or Wallachian night, with the sound of music from some open casement above. Regions such as these are the Principalities, and who would not keep them so, from the Danube to the Dneister, from the Straits of Otranto to the Euxine, for the refuge of necessitous wanderers who have an inconvenient connection, a tiresome run upon them from the public, or a simple desire for a para-

dise where a woman will not follow them, where letters will not come, where the game districts are unbeaten, and the deep woods and wild valleys as yet unsketched and unsung?

Through the Principalities, Erceldoune traveled in as brief a time, from the early dawn when he had left Paris, as mail trains, express specials, rapid relays of horses, and swift river passages could take him, across Tyrol and Venetia, Alps and Carpathians, Danube and Drave, calling at Belgrade with dispatches, and pushing straight on for Moldavia. Every mile of that wild and unworn way was as familiar to the Queen's Messenger as the journey between London and Paris is familiar to other men. Where steam had not yet penetrated, and there was no choice but between posting and the saddle, he usually rode; if the roads were level, and the route unsightly, he would take the luxurious rest of a "Messenger's carriage," and post through the nights and days; but, by preference, hard riding carried him over most of his ground, with pace and stay that none in the service could equal, and which had made the Arabs, when their horses swept beside his through the eastern sunlight, toss their lances aloft, and shout "*Fazzia! Fazzia!*" with applause to the Giaour. He rode so now, when, having passed direct from Belgrade across the lower angle of Transylvania, and crossed the Carpathian range, he found himself fairly set toward Moldavia, with only a hundred miles or so more left between him and Jassy, which was his destination.

The Principality was in a ferment; Church and civil power were in conflict and rivalry; England, France, Austria, and Russia were all disturbing themselves after the affairs of this out-of-the-way nook, conceiving that with Greece in insurrection, and Italy in a transition state, and Poland quivering afresh beneath her bonds, even Moldavia might be the match to a European conflagration, and open up the scarce-healed Eastern question; and an English envoy was then at Jassy, charged with a special mission, to whom the dispatches which Erceldoune bore carried special instructions, touching on delicate matters of moment to the affairs of central and eastern Europe, and to the part which would be played by Great Britain in the event of the freedom of the southern States, and the success of the

liberal party in Athens, Hungary, or Venetia. This one bag, with the arms of England on the seal, and the all-important instructions within, was all that he carried now, slung round his neck and across his chest by an undressed belt of chamois leather. He was wholly alone; his mountain guides he had dismissed at the foot of the Carpathians, for he had gone through the most dangerous defiles and thief-invested passes all over the world, caring for no other defense than lay in his holster pistols. He had been stopped two or three times, once by the "Bail-up!" of Tasmanian bushrangers, once by a Ghoorka gang in Northern India, once by a chieftain who levied black mail in the rocky fastnesses of Macedonia,—but his shots had always cleared him a passage through, and he had ridden on with no more loss than the waste of powder and ball. He was too well known, moreover, in both hemispheres, to be molested, and the boldest hill-robbers would have cared as little to come to close quarters with one whose strength had become proverbial, as to get themselves into trouble by tampering with the State courier of a great power.

It had been a splendid day in the young autumn, and it was just upon its close as he went through the forests, his mare, a pure-bred sorrel, scarcely touching the ground, as she swept along, swift as a greyhound or a lapwing. The air was heavily scented with the fragrance of the firs; the last lingering rays of light slanted here and there across the moss through dark fanlike boughs, cone-laden; aisles of pines stretched in endless and innumerable lines of paths scarce ever trodden save by the wolf, or the wild boar, or the charcoal-burner, barely more human than the brute; and, in the rear, to the westward, towered the Carpathians, with their black rugged sides reared in the purple sunset, the guard of the Magyar fatherland.

Now and then, at rare intervals, a little hamlet buried in the recesses of the forest, whose few wretched women wore the Turkish yashmâk, spoke of Moldavia, or he came on a camp of naked wild-eyed gipsies of the country; but as evening closed in, and Erceldoune advanced into a narrow rocky defile, the nearest passage through dense pine solitudes, even these signs of human life in its most brutalized phase, ceased wholly. There was only the rapid ring

of his mare's hoofs, given back by a thousand hollow echoes, as he swept down the ravine, with high precipitous walls of rock rising on either side, while the river thundered and foamed beside him, and the trees closing above head made it well-nigh dark as night, though beyond, the summits of the Hungarian range were still lit by the last rays of the sun gleaming golden on eternal snows. Sitting down in his saddle, with his eyes glancing, rapid and unerring as a soldier's, on either side where the shelving rocks sloped upward in the gloom, Erceldoune dashed along the defile at a pace such as the blood horses of the desert reach—the surging of the torrent at his side, the winds rising loud and stormy among the black pine-boughs above, the intense stillness and solitude around, that are only felt in the depths of a forest or the hush of a mountain-side.

These were what he loved in his life: these nights and days of loneliness, of action, of freedom, alone with all that was wildest and grandest in nature, under no law but the setting and rising of the sun, riding onward, without check or pause, a fresh horse ready saddled when the jaded one drooped and slackened; these were what suited the passionate need of liberty, the zest to do and dare, the eagle-love of solitude ingrained in his Border-blood, and as latent in him as in the chieftains of his name when they had borne fire and sword far away into stout Northumberland, or harried the Marches in their King's defiance.

The pressure of his knees sufficing for her guidance without curb or spur, the sorrel scoured the winding ravine, fleet and sure of foot, as though the rocky and irregular ground had been a level stretch of sward, her ears pointed, her pace like the wind, all the blood and mettle there were in her roused; she knew her master in her rider. Dashing onward through the gloom thus, suddenly his hand checked her; his eyes had seen what hers had not. Thrown back on her haunches in the midst of her breathless gallop, she reared in snorting terror; any other she might have hurled senseless to the earth; he sat as motionless as though horse and man were cast together in bronze.

Across the narrow and precipitous path lay the felled trunk of a pine, blocking the way. She rose erect, and stood so for a second, her rider in his saddle firm as on a

rock—a sculptor would have given ten years of his life to have caught and fixed that magnificent attitude;—then down she came with a crash on her fore feet, while from the black barricade of the leveled pine, through the thick screen of stiffened branches, came the gleam of half a dozen rifles, the long lean barrels glistening in the twilight.

The brigands lay in ambush waiting him; and the hoarse shout of arrest was pealed back by the echoes.

"Your papers—or we fire!"

And the steel muzzles covered him front and rear, while the challenge rang out down the vault of the hollowed rocks.

Swiftly as lightning his eyes swept over the leveled rifles and numbered them—eight against one; rapidly as the wind he drew his pistol from his holster and fired among them; a shrill shriek pierced the air, a man reeled headlong down into the gorge of the river foaming below, and without breath, without pause, Erceldoune put the bay at the leap, trusting the rest to her hunter's blood, and facing the leveled death-dealers full in the front. The gallant beast deserved his faith; she rose point-blank at the barricade, and leapt with one mighty bound the great pine-barrier and the glittering line of steel. She landed safe;—a second, and he would have raced onward, distancing all shot and defying all pursuit; but with a yell that rang from rock to rock, the murderous barrels she had overleapt and cleared, covered her afresh; the sharp crack of the shots echoed through the pass, three balls pierced her breast and flanks, bedding themselves where the life lay, and with a scream of piteous agony she threw her head upward, swayed to and fro an instant, and fell beneath him—dead. He sprang from the saddle ere her weight could crush him, and, with his back against the ledge of granite, turned at bay; hope he had not, succor there could be none in those dense mountain solitudes, those wastes of vast unpeopled pine-woods; in that hour he had but one thought—to sell his life dearly, and to deserve his country's trust.

The echoes of the conflict rang in quick succession on the stillness, thundered back by the reverberations of the hills; it was hot, close, mortal work in that narrow choked defile; Erceldoune, with his back against the granite, and

his dead bay at his feet between him and his foes, had the strength and the fury of a legion, now that his wrath was up in all its might, and the blood-thirst wakened in him. A ball broke his right arm above the wrist; it fell useless at his side. He laughed aloud:

"Blunderers! why don't you hit through the lungs?"

And as he changed his pistol into his left hand, he raised it, and the man who had shot him fell with a crash —a bullet through his brain. He could not load again; his arm was broken; and the hoarse yell of men, infuriated to be defied, and exasperated at their comrades' loss, told him his minutes were numbered, as one cry alone grated on the night air from many voices; in Romaic, in French, in Venetian, in Hungarian;—varied tongues, but one summons alone.

"Your papers or your life! Death, or surrender!"

There was a moment's hush and pause; they waited for their menace to do their work without the bloodshed that they shirked, from caution and from wisdom, rather than from humanity; and at that instant the moon, shed through one break in the black pine roofing above head, poured its light through the pass. Round him in a half circle, broken from their barricade and ambush now that his fire was spent, pressed his assassins, their faces masked by the crape drawn over them, their rifles covering him with pitiless purpose. With his right arm hanging powerless, and the mare lying at his feet, the sole barrier between him and the cross-fire leveled at him, stood Erceldoune, reared to his full height motionless as though he were a statue.

"Death, or surrender!"

The summons hissed through the silence with a deadly meaning, a hoarse snarl such as the hounds give when the stag holds them too long at bay. Erceldoune stood erect, his eyes glancing calmly down on the semicircle of the long shining lines of steel, each of whose hollow tubes carried his death-warrant; a look upon his face before which the boldest, though they held his life in their hands and at their mercy, quailed; he knew how he should save his trust and his papers, though he knew that his life must pay the forfeit. He calmly watched the leveled rifles, and

a half smile passed over his face;—they had brought eight against one—it was a distinction, at least, to take so much killing.

"The devil will never give in!" swore with savage Hungarian oaths the farthest of the band. "Seize him, and bind him!—we don't want his blood."

"Take the papers, and gag him. Carl is right; we want them, not him," muttered another, in whose southern German the keen ear of him whose life they balanced caught the foreign accent of a Gallican.

One who seemed the leader of the gang laughed—a rolling, mellow, harmonious laugh, which thrilled through the blood of Erceldoune as menace and challenge had never done; he had heard it a few nights before in the gaslit salon of the Parisian café.

"Basta, basta! 'Too many words, my masters.' Kill the Border Eagle and strip him afterward! His beak won't peck when he's shot down!"

"Stop—stop!" muttered a milder Sicilian. "Give him his choice; we only want the dispatches."

"The papers then, or we fire!"

The moon shone clearer and whiter down into the ravine, while they pressed nearer and nearer till the half circle of steel glittered close against him within a yard of his breast;—and the Greek who in the Café Minuit had lamented so softly the prosaic fate of the violet bonbons, pressed closest of all. He stood quietly, with no change in his attitude, and his broken wrist dripping blood on the stone at his feet; the dark scorn of fiery passions had lowered on his face, stormy, dangerous, menacing as the wrath that lightens up a lion's eyes, while on his lips was a laugh—a laugh for the coward caution of his assassins, the womanish cruelty which compassed him with such timorous might of numbers, fearing one man unarmed and wounded!

"Death, or surrender!"

The cry echoed again, loud and hoarse now as the hounds' bay, baffled and getting furious for blood.

His back was reared against the rock; his left arm pressed against his breast, holding to him the seals that were his trust; his eyes looked down upon them steadily as he answered:

"Fire!"

And while his voice, calm and unfaltering, gave the word of command for his own death-volley, with a swift sudden gesture, unlooked for and unarrested by them, he lifted his left hand, and hurled far away through the gloom, till they sank with a loud splash into the bed of the swollen rushing river, the white bag of the English dispatches;—lost forever in the deep gorge, and whirled on into darkness with the passage of foaming waters, where no spy could reach and no foe could rob them.

Then, as the ravenous yell of baffled force and infuriated passion shook the echoes of the hills, the report of the rifles rang through the night with sullen murderous peal, and Erceldoune fell as one dead.

All was still in the heart of the forest.

The snowy summits of the Carpathians gleamed white in the moonlight; the cry of the wild dog or the growl of the wild boar, the screech of the owl or the rush of the bat's wing, alone broke the silence; above the dark silent earth the skies were cloudless, and studded with countless stars, whose radiance glistened here and there through dense black shadow, on moss, and boulders, and cavernous gorges, and torrents plunging downward through the night. In the narrow channel of the defile, with gnarled pines above and waters roaring in their pent-up bed below, there lay the stiffened corpse of the mare, and across her body, bathed in her blood and in his own, with his head fallen back, and his face turned upward as the starlight fell upon it, was stretched the Queen's Messenger, where they had left him for dead.

The night had passed on and the hours stolen apace, till the stars had grown large in the heavens, and the morning planet risen in the east before the dawn; and he had lain there, as lifeless and motionless as the sorrel beneath him, through all the watches of the night which parted the sunset of one day from the daybreak of the next. His right arm, broken and nerveless, was flung across the neck of the mare, as though his last thought as he fell had been of the brute friend whom he had lost, and who had died for him; the blood had poured from a deep chest wound,

till the black velvet of his riding coat was soaked through and through, and the mosses and the grasses were dyed with the stream that bore his life away; his face was stern yet serene, like many faces of the dead upon a battle-field, and only a deep-drawn labored breath, that quivered at long intervals through all his frame, showed that existence had not wholly ceased with the murderous volley which had brought him to the earth, as his own shot had brought the kingly fearless strength of the golden eagle reeling downward to his fate. Either the aim of his assassins had been uncertain from the fury with which they had leveled and fired when they had seen their errand baffled, and the dispatches flung beyond all reach into the mountain gorge, or they had been blinded by the flickering shadows of the moon, and the lust of their vengeance on him, for two shots alone had touched him out of the five which had been fired at him. One ball had pierced his breast, and brought him down senseless, and, to all semblance, lifeless; it had been aimed by the leader of the band who had trifled with his ice, and mourned over the conserve of violets in Paris a few nights before. The other bullet, which had struck him in the chest, and would have cut its way straight through the lungs, had been turned aside by the solid silver of his meerschaum, in whose bowl the ball was bedded, though the force of its concussion would have stretched him insensible without a wound. He had fallen as one dead, and they had left him for such in the narrow defile, hastening themselves to leave the pine forest far behind them, and put the range of the Carpathians between them and Moldavia, taking their own wounded with them, and plunging into the recesses of the woods, where all pursuit could be baffled, all detection defied. Whether they were mountain banditti, or masked nobles, or insurgent conspirators, those vast solitudes would never reveal, since the deed would tell no tales and bear no witness; his assassination, if ever known, would be traced, they deemed, to gipsies or charcoal burners, while the odds were a million to one that the fate of the English State courier would never be heard of, but remain in the shroud of an impenetrable mystery, while he lay in the lonely and untrodden ravine, till the bears and the vultures left his bones

to whiten unburied when they had sated their hunger on the sinewy limbs of the man who had fallen to avoid the surrender of his honor and his trust.

Darkness closes thus over the fate of many; he is "missing," and we know no more.

Nearly lifeless thus, Erceldoune had remained through the long hours where his assassins had left him; about him only the shrieking of the owls, the sough of the winds among the pines, and the distant roar of the beasts of prey, to whom his enemies had trusted for the completion and the burial of their work. Weaker men would have succumbed to less danger than he had often brooked and passed through scathless; and even now the athletic strength within him refused to perish. The flowing of the blood had stopped, a labored sigh now and then gave sign of vitality, though not of consciousness; then, as the night was waning, a shudder ran through all his frame, and his eyes unclosed, looking upward, without light or sense, to the starlit vault above.

He remembered nothing.

The deep skies and "the stars in their courses" whirled giddily above him; the pine-boughs flickered in phantom shapes before his sight; the sounds of the winds and of the falling torrents smote dully on his ear; he had no sense but of suffocation from the congealed blood upon his chest, and the sharp agony of every breath; he wondered dimly, dreamily, who he was, and where he lay. An intense thirst parched his throat and oppressed his lungs—a thirst he suffered from without knowing what the torture could be—and the plunge and splash of the cascades in the gorge below filled his brain with vague thronging images of cool still lakes, of rushing brooks, of deep brown tarns among his native moorlands, and through them all he stood ever up to the lips in the cold delicious waters, yet ever powerless to stoop and taste one drop! The sweep of a night-bird's wing touched his forehead as it flew low under the drooped pine-branches; at the touch consciousness slowly and confusedly awoke; the night ceased to whirl round him in a chaos of shadow, the planets grew clear and familiar, and looked down on him from the dizzy mists circling above. By sheer instinct he sought to raise his right

hand; it was powerless, and as he stretched out his left arm he felt the chill stiffened body of his lost mare, and the grasses wet with her blood and his own; then thought and recollection awoke from the mists of death, and he remembered all.

He knew that he was lying there wounded unto death, beyond all appeal for aid, all hope of succor, powerless to drive from him the frailest insect that with the morning light should begin the fell work of corruption and destruction, alone in his last hour in the desolation of the Carpathians, with no companion save the beast of prey, no watcher but the carrion kite.

Dread of death he had never known; there was no such coward weakness in him now, in his worst extremity, when he knew that he was dying in the best years of his manhood, slaughtered by the baseness of treacherous assassination, alone in the pent defile where his murder had been planned, and where no human step would ever come, except it were that of some mountain plunderer, who would strip off the linen and the velvet that the birds of prey would have left untouched, while his bones should lie there through summer drought and winter storm unburied, unlamented, unavenged. Fear was not on him even now in his dying hour, but a mortal sense of loneliness that his life had never known stole over him as he wakened in the hush of the forest night, paralyzed, powerless, strengthless, felled in his full force, slain, like the golden eagle, by a single shot. The heavens, studded with their stars, looked chill and pitiless; the rocks towered upward in the moonlight, shutting him out from all the peopled slumbering world; no sound smote the stillness save the distant sullen moan of the brutes seeking their prey, and the winds sweeping and wailing through the endless aisles of pines;—he died in solitude.

The night wore on; a profound and awful silence reigned around, only broken by the growl of wolves or the scream of foxes from their distant haunts; the ravening cry borne on the blast of those who, with each second which passed away, might scent blood from afar off, and track it in their hunger, and come down to rend, and tear, and devour, finishing the work of slaughter. He heard that sullen bay

all through the night where he lay, across the dead mare motionless; he could not have stirred a limb, though the fangs of the wild boar had been at his throat, or the wolves in a troop been upon him. Hope or thought of succor he had none; he was in the deep heart of the mountains, where none could come; and he knew too well the lore of desert and camp not to know that all chance of life was over, that his last hour was here, and that if the vulture and the bear did not track him out he would die of the loss of blood alone; or that if his frame bore up against the exhaustion of his wounds through the day which would soon dawn, he would perish but the more slowly, and the more agonizingly, of famine and of thirst.

Time wore on; the stars grew large as the morning drew near, and his eyes gazed upward at them where he lay in the pass of the defile; a thousand nights on southern seas, in tropic lands, in eastern aisles of palm, through phosphor-glittering waters while his ship cleft her way, through the white gleam of snow steppes while the sleigh bells chimed, through the torchlit glades of forests while the German boar or the French stag was hunted to his lair, drifted to memory as the moon shone down on him through the break in the massed pine-boughs;—for he had ever loved the mere sense and strength of life; all

. . "the wild joys of living, the leaping from rock to rock,
The strong rending of boughs from the fir-tree, the cool river shock
Of a plunge in a pool's living water,—the hunt of the bear,
And the sultriness showing the lion is couched in his lair."

And he knew that this glory was dead in him forever; and that when those stars rose on another night, and shed their brightness upon earth and ocean, forest and sea, his eyes would be blind to their light and behold them no more, since he should be stricken out from the world of the living.

At last,—it seemed that an eternity had come and gone.—the day reached him, dawning from the splendor of Asia far away.

The light streamed in the east, the darkness of the shadows was broken by the first rays of warmth, the night-birds fled to their roost, and above the clouds rose the sun, bathing the sleeping world in its golden gladness, and

shining full on the snow peaks of the mountains. The forest life awoke; the song of countless birds rose on the silence, the hum of myriad insects murmured beneath the grasses, the waters of innumerable torrents glistened in the sunbeams;—and, alone in the waking and rejoicing world, he lay, dying.

About him, where never sunlight came, were dank grasses, and the gloomy foliage of pines, but above head, far aloft through the walls of granite, was the blue and cloudless sky of a summer dawn. His eyes looked upward to it heavily, and with the film gathering fast over them; in his physical anguish, in his sore extremity, there were still beauty and solace in the day.

Yet as he gazed, the heavens were darkened, the sunlit morning became more loathsome than all the solitude and darkness of the night; wakened in the dawn and poised in air, drawn thither by the scent of blood, he saw the flocks of carrion-birds, the allies whom the assassins trusted to destroy all trace of their work, the keepers of the vigil of the dead. Cleaving the air and wheeling in the light, they gathered there, vulture and kite, raven and rock-eagle, coming with the sunrise to their carrion feast, sweeping downward into the defile with shrill and hideous clamor till they alit beside him, in their ravenous greed, upon the body of the mare, striking their beaks into her eyes and whetting their taste in her flesh, rending and lacerating, and disputing their prey.

Thus he had seen them, many a time, making their feast on the lion or camel of the East; and a sickness of loathing came upon him, and a horror unutterable;—bound in the bonds of death, and powerless to lift his arm against them, he must wait, half living and half dead, while these hungry hordes tore at his heart.

A cry broke from him, loud and terrible—a shout for help, where help there could be none. Its echo pealing from the rocks, scared and scattered the ravening birds one instant from their lust; they wheeled and circled in the sunlit air, then settled once more on their spoil.

A single vulture, driven from the rest, poised above him —waiting. Looking upward, he saw the bird, with its dark wings outstretched, sailing in rings round and round

in the sunlight glare, impatient and athirst, its glittering eyes fixed on him—the watcher and the harbinger of death.

By the sheer force of animal instinct, strength for the moment was restored; he sprang up to drive from off him the murderous beak that would seek his life blood, the carrion-greed that would wrench out his eyes while yet they saw the day! He leapt forward, striking wildly and blindly at the black shadow of the hovering bird; at the action the wound opened, the hemorrhage broke out afresh —he fell back senseless.

CHAPTER IV.

"N'ETES VOUS PAS DU PARADIS?"

EVEN in the silent heart of the Carpathian woods two had heard that shout of mortal extremity.

They were but a woman and a wolf-hound, resting together under the shade of the pines higher up, where the head of the torrent tumbled and splashed from rock to rock, its sheet of foam glittering in the warmth of the risen day. They heard it;—and the woman rose with a stag-like grace of terror, blent with a haughty challenge of such weakness, and the dog, with his bristling mane erect, and his head lifted in the air, woke the echoes with a deep-mouthed bay. Both listened—all was still;—then she laid her hand on the hound's shaggy coat, and gave him a single word of command. He waited, sniffing the scent borne to him on the wind, then, with his muzzle to the earth, sprang off; she followed him; the lights and shadows from the pine-boughs above flung, flickering and golden, on her uncovered hair; a woman fair as the morning, with the free imperial step of the forest deer, and the beauty of the classic and glorious south; the beauty of Aspasia of Athens, of Lucrezia of Rome.

A few short seconds, and the hound plunged down into the pass, baying loud in fear and fury, as though he tracked the trail of the crime. The birds flew up with whirling tumult from their meal, and wheeled aloft, scared and scattered; the vulture that had her talons tangled in the hair of the fallen man, and was stretching her plumed throat to deal her first aim at his sightless eyes, taking wing slowly, leaving her prey reluctantly. The woman fell on her knees beside him where he lay across the body of his slaughtered mare, as lifeless to all semblance as the animal.

She knew that she was in the presence of crime, and she believed herself in that of death; this man had been slain foully in the heart of the forest, and she was alone, in the mountain ravine that had seen the guilt done and the blow dealt, alone with one whom his enemies had left to perish and lie unburied for the hawks and crows to tear. The night had witnessed the sin and shrouded it; she and the sunny light of day had tracked and found it. And the sickness of its guilt was on her in all its ghastliness, in all its secret craven vileness.

One thought alone seemed left her; was she too late, or could this human life, even in its last hour, be saved, be called back even though it had ebbed away?

She felt for the beating of his heart; a quick shudder ran through all her frame—her hand was wet with the blood that had soaked through linen and velvet, and flowed in its deep stream from his breast. Yet she did not shrink, but pressed it there, seeking for the throbbing of the life; the pulse beat slowly, faintly still, beneath her touch—he lived even now. The carrion-birds were poised on the boughs, or settled on the rocky ledges, waiting for the prey which soon or late must come to them; the hound was tearing up the moss with his muzzle to the earth; she called him to her; the dog was her friend, her guard, her slave—he came, reluctantly, looking backward at the mosses he had uprooted in his thirst for the scent they gave; she drew him to her, and signed him to look at the dying man where he was stretched across his horse; then pointed to the westward with some words in Silesian. The hound looked upward an instant with earnest, eloquent eyes,

trying to read her will—then, at his full speed, obeyed her, and went down the ravine; she had sent from her her sole defender, while, for aught she knew, the murderers of the man she sought to save might return to the scene of their outrage, and deal with her as they had dealt with him. But cowardice was scarcely more in her blood than in his to whose succor she had come with the light of the morning, and whose face was turned upward white and rigid, in mute appeal, in voiceless witness, stern, as one who has fallen in fierce contest, but calm as though he lay in the tranquillity of sleep. She gazed at him thus, till hot tears gathered in her eyes, and fell upon his forehead; he was a stranger, and not of her land; she knew not how his death had been dealt, nor in what cause he had fallen, whence he came, nor what his life had been; but his face touched to the heart all of pity there was in her, where he lay blind and unconscious in the glory of the sun, though many had said that pity was a thing unknown to her. The falling of her tears upon his brow, or the touch of her hand as it swept back the hair from his temples, and fanned his temples with a fragrant bough of pine to freshen the sultry heat of the noonday, awoke him to some returning life; a heavy sigh heaved his chest, he stirred wearily, and his lips moved without sound. She knew what he must need—all of comfort or of aid that she could give—and folding one of the broad dock leaves cup-shape, she filled it at the bed of the torrent, and, raising his head, held the cold water to his parched and colorless lips.

Unconsciously, instinctively, he drank and drank, slaking the intolerable thirst; she filled it three times at the channel of the river, and he drained in new existence from that green forest-cup, from that fresh and icy water, held to him by his ministering angel. Then his head sank back, lying against her, resting on her arm; his eyes had not unclosed, he was senseless still, save that he was vaguely conscious of a sense of coolness, languor, rest, and peace; and the vultures on the rocks above looked down with ravenous impatience, waiting till the watcher should weary of her vigil, and their prey be their own again.

She would not have left him now though she should have died with him. She knew the lawless brutality of the mountain hordes of gipsies and of plunderers, well enough to know that in all likelihood those who had left him for dead might return to strip him of all that was of value on his person, and would slay her, without remorse or mercy, lest she should bear testimony to them and to their work; but to desert him and leave him to the lust of the carrion-birds and the torrid heat of the noon never passed in thought even before her—whatever fate should come of it, she had cast in her lot with his.

The sun fell through the tracery of firs upon the rushing water, the mosses red with blood, the black flock of the waiting birds, and the motionless form of Erceldoune, stretched across his slaughtered horse, his head resting, as if in the serenity of sleep, upon the bosom of the woman who had saved him, while above bent the magnificence of her face, with a golden light on its mournful splendor, and the softness of compassion in the luster of the eyes that watched him in his unconsciousness.

Time wore on, the sun rose to noon height, the heat grew more intense, and they were still alone; he lay as in a trance still, but with that vague sense of coolness and of peace, all that he knew or sought to know; once his eyes unclosed, weary and blind, and saw, as in a vision, the face as of an angel above him. He had not strength to rouse, power to wonder, consciousness to know or ask whether he slept, or dreamed, or beheld but the phantom of his own brain; but his eyes gazed upward at the loveliness that looked down on him, with the warmth of morning on it, and it pierced through the mists of death and the chaos of unconsciousness, and sank into his sight and heart, never again to be forgotten. While the sun was at its zenith and the day rolled onward, he was conscious, through all his anguish, despite all his stupor, of the fragrance of leaves that fanned his brow and stirred the heated air with soothing movement, of the gentle murmur of river-waters sounding through the stillness, and—ever when his eyes unclosed and looked upward on the radiance of the day—of the face that he saw in the luminance of the light, even as the face of a guardian angel. And

he knew no more in the dullness of lulled pain, in the languor of profound exhaustion.

The loud bay of a hound broke the silence when noon long had passed, the rapid rush of the dog's feet scoured over the rocks above and down the winding path; he had known that he had been bidden to seek succor, and had left those he first met no peace till they had followed him —two Moldavian peasants, herdsmen or stable-helpers, who had understood the meaning of the hound's impatient bark and whine.

At the sound of their steps she moved from the wounded man, and rose, with the grace which made her every action beautiful as the wild antelope's, imperial as a sovereign's in her court.

The Moldavians listened with profound reverence while she spoke, and without pause or question hastened to obey her command; deeds of violence were not so rare at the foot of the Carpathians, in the heart of the Principalities, as to excite either the horror or the wonder of the passive serfs; they went without a word to their work, wrenched down the long boughs of the pines, stripped them, lashed the bare poles together, and covered them with lesser branches of the firs, overstrewn in turn by the yielding velvet moss of the forest, till they had formed a rude stretcher, rough in form but fragrant and easy; then they laid him on it, lifting him with kindly gentleness. At the first movement which raised him, and the sharp agony it caused, careful and not untender though it was, he fainted; they might have taken him where they would; he knew nothing. The Moldavians prepared to raise the litter on their shoulders, then looked to her:

"Home, your Excellency?"

She started, and stood silent; then over the light and beauty of her face swept a shadow, as of bitter memory.

"No—no!" she answered them, in their own Moldavian tongue. "Go to the Convent of Monastica; it is nearer, and they will tend him better there. If any can save him, the Sisters will."

"And we are to tell them——?"

"Tell them where you found this stranger, lying as one dead, and powerless to say who are his assassins; do not

give my name, or speak of me; that he is wounded, and alone, and in need, will be enough to gain him care and pity at Monastica. When you have left him in safety at the convent, come back here; you shall bury the horse, it shall not be food for vultures. Now go—each moment is precious. I shall know with what fidelity you serve him, and shall reward you as you do it well."

Yet, though she had bidden them go, she stood still, looking down on the litter where Erceldoune lay; she had saved this man's life at peril of her own, yet they would probably never meet again; she had redeemed him from amid the dead, yet he would have no memory of her, no knowledge that she had been with him in the hour of his extremity, and rescued him from his grave. Her eyes dwelt on him in a silent farewell, and a certain tenderness came over all her face as she bowed her head, while her lips moved with the words of a Greek prayer and benediction over the life of which she knew nothing, yet which in some sense had been made her own by every law of gratitude for a great deliverance.

Then she signed to the bearers to raise the litter and go onward. They wound slowly with their burden up the narrow pass, and she sank down on the fallen trunk leveled by his assassins for their barricade, her rich dress sweeping the blood-stained mosses, her head resting on her hands that were twisted in the lustrous masses of her hair; her eyes, with their mournful brilliance, their luminance fathomless as that of tropic skies by night, gazing into the depths of the torrent foaming below in its black bed; and at her side the Silesian hound, his mane erect, his head uplifted, his feet pawing the turf, as though he scented the blood-trail, and panted for command to hunt the evil-doers to their lair.

A small antique chamber, with gray walls and snow-white draperies; an ebony crucifix with a marble Christ hanging above an altar draped with velvet, and broidered with gold, and fragrant with lilies in silver cups; a painted Gothic window through which were seen stretches of green pine-woods and golden haze beyond; and an intense stillness through which pealed, softly and subdued, the chant

of the *Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi,*—these were what Erceldoune opened his eyes upon, and saw, and heard, when he awoke from a long trance that had been death itself for aught he knew, and through which he had only been conscious of burning torture, of intolerable pain, of mellow strains of music floating through his brain, and of one face of divinest beauty bent above him while he lay bound in bonds of iron, in swathes of fire. For he had been delirious for many days in the Convent of Monastica.

His life had hung on a thread; the ball was in his breast, and the fever of his wounds, combined with the weakness consequent on loss of blood, had kept him in sharpest peril through all the rest of that sultry autumn. But the bullet had missed his lungs, and the intense vitality and resistance in him brought him through all which would have slain at a blow a weaklier and less hardily trained frame. The skill in leechcraft of the Sisters of Monastica was proverbial in the Principalities; women who loved him could not have tended him more tenderly and unweariedly than did those high-born recluses who had sought the solitudes of the dense Moldavian pine-forests, in a conventual community different to those of any other country. He was saved, and awoke one sunlit evening, conscious and calm, gazing dreamily and wonderingly at the dead Christ on the altar, and the narrow arched window, with its glimpse of plain and forest through the slit, while the *Agnus Dei* pealed on the stillness of the chamber. He thought himself dreaming still.

To his bedside came a nun, pale, gentle, with dovelike eyes, a woman no longer young. Erceldoune looked at her dimly; the past was a blank, yet unfamiliar as the chamber was to him, and unreal his own personality, he vaguely desired and missed what he had seen throughout his delirium—what he did not behold on awakening. And the first words he spoke were:

"Where is *she?*"

The Sister shook her head, looking on him with a compassionate welcoming smile:

"I cannot understand, my son. I can speak a little French, but you must not talk yet, you are too weak."

All European languages, most of the Eastern, had been

as familiar to him as his own. He repeated his question impatiently in the nun's tongue:

"Where is she?"

"Who, my son?"

"Who? A woman—or an angel—who has been with me always."

"None have been with you, my son, save myself and those of my order."

He made a faint intolerant sign of dissent; and his eyes wandered over the place where he lay, in weary search, missing in consciousness and in reality the face which had been ever before him in delirium.

"Where am I, then?"

"In our convent at Monastica. You were found all but lifeless in the forest by two peasants, who brought you hither. You have been in sore peril, my son, but, by the blessing of the most holy Mother of God, we have wrought your cure. But keep silence, and rest now, you are very weak."

"Weak?—*I?*"

He repeated the word in marveling incredulity; he who had stood face to face with the lion in the sultry African night, and measured his strength with the desert king's, and prevailed,—he who from his childish years upward, through a long, and daring, and adventurous life, had never known his force to fail, his power to desert him,—was unable to realize that he could be laid low and powerless as any reed leveled by the wind! Instinctively he lifted his right arm to raise himself—that right arm which had never failed him yet in battle, in storm, in the death-grapple, or in any blow dealt in love of justice, in hatred of dishonor—it fell nerveless and broken. *Then* he realized that his strength was gone; and for the sole time in his life, Erceldoune could have turned his face to the wall and wept like a woman.

"I remember," he said, faintly. "I remember now. The cowards shot me down, and she saved me. Tell them I destroyed 'the papers;' but——"

The words died away unintelligible to the nun, his head fell back, and his eyes closed; he felt how utter was his weakness. He lay exhausted, his thoughts wandering

over all that past of peril which had long been a blank to him, and which now slowly and by degrees returned to memory, striving to realize what manner of thing this could be, this calamity of stricken strength which his life had never before dreaded or conceived. Sweeping like fire through his blood, and filling his frame as with fresh life, there came with consciousness recollection of the murderous gang who had stretched him there, and fierce natural thirst for vengeance on his cowardly foes, for the hour of reckoning when he should rise and deal with that craven womanish brute, whose gentle mellow laugh had bidden them "kill the Border Eagle," and whose shot had brought him to the earth.

A fair and open antagonist Erceldoune would honor, and forgive frankly and generously from his heart; but to the coward treachery that struck him in the dark, he swore that death itself should not be more pitiless or more inexorable than his wrath.

The shadows lengthened through the painted window, the music ceased from the convent chapel, the nun left him, and knelt before the altar lost in prayer; it was intensely still, no sound was upon the air save that from the distance the bells of one of the Moldavian monasteries were chiming the vespers—it was a pause as strange in his strong, rapid, varied, richly-colored life of action and adventure as that which we feel when we enter the shaded silent aisles of some cathedral, and the doors close behind us, shutting out all the accustomed crowds, the busy whirl, and the swift press, and the hot sunlight of the city we have left without. He had never known in all the years of his existence that profound exhaustion, that death-like prostration, in which all vitality seems suspended, and in which a lulled, dreamy, listless meditation is all of which we are left capable; he knew them now as he lay gazing at the altar, with its dead Christ and its white river-lilies, and the bowed form of the kneeling nun, while all sense of pain, of weakness, of thirst for the just vengeance he would rise and reach, drifted from him, merged and lost in one memory. A memory luminous, angel-like, as are the imaginations which fill the mind of painters with shapes divine and visions of beauty, but such as had never entered

the life or the thoughts of this man till now, when, in the sunset stillness of the lonely oratory at Monastica he saw ever before him, with the depths of an unspeakable compassion in her fathomless eyes, the face of the woman who had saved him.

Where was she?

He questioned ceaselessly for many days each of the order who came to his bedside and tended him with skilled care, and brought him fruits and sherbet, and prayed for him at the altar, where the lilies were placed fresh with every dawn, and the dead God looked down with serene and mournful smile. He insisted that a woman had come to him in the defile when he lay there dying, and had given him water, and had saved him. They thought his persistence the remembrance of some delirious hallucination, some dream which haunted him, and which he could not sever from reality. He saw the Moldavian serfs, who came each day during his danger to the convent for news of him; and, while he rewarded them, interrogated them as to how and where they had discovered him. They answered that a dog had led them to where he lay, and that they had seen that he was all but lifeless, and had made a litter of pine-boughs and brought him to the gates of Monastica for succor. When he pressed them, and insisted that a woman had been the first to rescue him, the Moldavians shook their heads; *they* had found him, and had brought him hither. They had barely more intelligence than that of a kindly good-humored animal, and adhered doggedly to their statement; it was useless to question them; Erceldoune bade them be given half the gold pieces in his traveling-belt, and let them go. It was not his nature to pursue uselessly, nor to give expression to a futile annoyance or an unavailing disappointment; he was silent from that moment on the subject.

The nuns, with their Mother Superior, thought he had become convinced that his fancy was the phantom of his delirium. Erceldoune remained certain that no unreality, no mere vision, fever begotten, would have been impressed as this was upon him; he remembered what it would have been wholly unlike him to have imagined. And this fugitive memory of one who had been his savior in his ex-

tremity, yet who was lost to him on his awakening to consciousness, filled his thoughts unceasingly during the lull of his life in the solitudes of Monastica.

For many weeks he lay there in the antique quiet chamber, with the glimpse of hill and torrent seen through its single casement, and the cadence of the *Angelus* or the *Pro Peccatis* alone breaking the stillness at matins, mass, or vespers; the inaction, the imprisonment, the monotony, were as intolerable to him as to a fettered lion, for though solitude might be oftentimes his preference, it was ever the solitude of freedom, of action, and of the grandeur of desert wilds. He recovered slowly but surely, the science of the Sisters and his own natural strength bringing him through in the teeth of imminent peril; but it was far into the autumn, and the pines were the only trees not bare in the Moldavian woods, when he rose with anything of his old power in his limbs, with anything of the old muscular force in his right arm, and breathed without pain, and was free to go back to the world of the living without danger.

Meanwhile, Europe rang for a space with his attempted assassination. A Queen's Messenger could not have been left for murdered, and English State papers of the first and most secret importance been waylaid by so singular and trained a conspiracy, without the outrage being of import, and rousing alike the wrath of his government and the speculations of all other powers. That those who had stopped him were no ordinary assassins and marauders the object of their plunder showed; common banditti would have menaced his money, not his dispatches. It seemed evident that his enemies had been men of considerable resources and power, that they had been well acquainted with his movements, and that their object had been political. Southern Europe was in the throes of revolt, and much of central and eastern Europe seething in intrigue; political gamesters would have counted one man's assassination a very little cost for the gain of political information and advantage in their unscrupulous rouge et noir.

Amid all, the criminals remained untracked. Moldavia said she did all she could to discover and render them up to justice. Whether or not this were true, they were un-

discovered: the little State was heavily mulcted for the outrage, and the perpetrators went scot free at large, the night and their masks having shrouded them, the pine-forests telling no tales, and the sole clew to their subsequent identification lying in Erceldoune's recognition by voice of their ringleader, as the vivacious and graceful bewailer for the sacrifice of crystallized violets whom he had met at the Paris café.

The menace of England failed to track his assassins and bring them to their reckoning; but he swore that sooner or later his own vengeance should find them, and strike home to that tiger brute whose laugh he would know again though a score of years should have rolled away before they stood face to face.

"You bear no malice to your savage murderers, my son?" said the Abbess of Monastica to him, wistfully, one day, an aged woman, white-haired and venerable, gentle as a child, and unworldly as an infant, for she had taken the veil in her fourteenth year, and had never left the convent now that she had reached her seventieth, save on an occasional visit, as permitted by Moldavian rules, to the innocent festivities of Jassy.

Malice, madam? No! I am not a woman!"

The Abbess looked at him wistfully still; the answer was affirmative, yet she was not wholly secure that this was the meek and lowly mercy which she sought to win from him.

"Then you forgive them, my son, and would remember, if you met them, the Lamb of God's injunction, 'If thy enemy smite thee on one cheek, give him the other,' and would refrain from all vengeance—would you not?"

Erceldoune's hand came down on the massive oak table standing by him with a force that shook it to its center.

"By my honor, madam, I would remember it so, that the life should not be left in one of them! Forgive? Ay! when I have turned dastard like them."

The Mother Superior gazed at him with perplexed trouble in her eyes; the childlike innocent woman could not understand the strong unfettered nature of the man, with its deep passions and its fiery honor, which made the low serpent meanness of malice as impossible and incom-

prehensible to him as it made the chastisement of cowardice and the vengeance of treachery instinctive and imperative, resistless as an impulse as it was sacred as a duty.

"But forgiveness is godlike, my son."

"May be, madam; but I am mortal."

"But it is a human duty."

"To an open, gallant foe, madam—yes! I will render it him to-morrow, and honor him from my soul the better he fights me and the harder he strikes; but the serpent that stings me in the dark I set my heel on, for the vermin he is, and serve God and man when I strangle him!"

The venerable Abbess sighed; she had ministered to him through his unconsciousness and through his suffering, she had seen him bear torture with a silent endurance that seemed to her superhuman in its heroism, and she had wept over the stately stature, leveled like a cedar felled by the axe, and the superb strength brought down to worse than a child's weakness, till she had felt for him something of a mother's tenderness, and found it hard to urge him to love and to pardon his injurers. Moreover, Mother Veronica was no casuist.

"It must be bitter, my son, I know," she murmured, "and the evil spirit is strong in us, and fearful to subdue; but one who suffered a deadlier wrong than thine forgave the traitor and the murderer, though Judas sold him to the Cross."

Erceldoune gave a movement of impatience, and the muscles of his arm straightened as though by sheer instinct of longing to "deliver from the shoulder."

"Pardon me, holy mother, I am no theologian! But I know this, that if there had been a touch of loyalty and fealty among the eleven left, that scoundrel of Iscariot would not have lived till the morrow to hang himself. If I had been in Galilee, he would have had a lunge of steel through his lungs, and died a traitor's death!"

So startling a view of apostolic duty had never penetrated the sacred walls of the Convent of Monastica; the whole range of her instruction from the Church had never given her a rule by which to deal with such a novel article of creed, and she sat silent, gazing at him with a wistful bewilderment, wondering what the sainted Remigius had

replied when King Clovis gave him a similar answer in the old days of Gaul.

Erceldoune, who felt a sincere gratitude to the aged woman who had showed him a mother's tenderness and care throughout a lengthened peril, bent to her with gentle reverence, which sat well upon him.

"Pardon me, madam, I spoke something roughly, and men should not talk of these matters to women. There is one broad ground on which we can meet and understand one another, that of your goodness to a stranger, and his sincere recognition of it. Let that suffice!"

And Mother Veronica smiled wistfully on him, and after seventy years of unsullied devotion to the Supreme Church, found herself guilty of the horrible heresy of loving one whose soul was lost, and whose wild living will, and erring, wayward creeds, were the most fatal forms of tumult and revolt against which the Infallible Faith warned her!

An eagle from his native Cheviot-side, fettered in a cage, would not have been less fitted for it than Erceldoune for his imprisonment at Monastica; as soon as he was strong enough to be raised in his couch, and was able to use his arm, he beguiled the time with a pastime which had often whiled away hours and days of enforced inaction, in quarantine, on board ship, becalmed in the tropics, or cooped up in Marseilles during the mistral. He painted extremely well. He was too thorough a man of action, too truly the English Effendi of the Eastern nations, ever to take art or indolence by choice; but there had come many times in his life when to paint the rare scenery, or the picturesque groupings around him, had been his only available pursuit; and he did this with singular dash and delicacy, vividness and truth. Erceldoune would never have been a creative artist; he had not the imaginative or poetic faculty which idealizes, it was wholly alien to his nature and his habits; but what he *saw* he rendered with a force, a fidelity, and a brilliance of hue which painters by the score had envied him. He passed the dreary weeks now at Monastica painting what he had seen; and the picture grew into such life and loveliness that the nuns marveled when they looked on it, as the Religieuses of Bruges mar-

veled when they saw the "Marriage of St. Katherine" left in legacy to them by the soldier-artist Hans Hemling, whose wounds they had dressed, and cried out that it should be the Virginal altar-piece in a world-famed cathedral. Yet the picture was but a woman's face—a face with thoughtful lustrous eyes, and hair with a golden reflex on it, and lips which wore a smile that had something more profound than sadness, and more imperial than tenderness; a face looking downward from an aureole of light, half sunlit and half shadowed.

"Now I know that I have seen it, or I could not have painted it," said Erceldoune to himself, as he cast down his brushes; and to know that, was why he had done so.

"Keep the picture, madam, as altar-piece, or what it please you, in token of my gratitude at the least for the kindness I cannot hope to return," he said to the Mother Superior; "and, if you ever see a woman whose likeness you recognize in it, she will be the one to whom I first owed the rescue of my life. Tell her Fulke Erceldoune waits to pay his debt."

And Mother Veronica heard him with as much pain in his last words as she had had pleasure in his first, for she saw that the phantom of his delirium was still strong on him, and feared that his mind must wander, to be so haunted by this mere hallucination of the lady of his dreams.

A few days later on, Erceldoune, able at last to endure the return journey through the mountains and across Hungary, attended a Te Deum to gratify the Abbess, in celebration and thanksgiving for his own restoration from death to life; left his three months' pay to the almsgiving of the order; bowed his lofty head for the tearful benediction of the Mother Superior; and quitted the innocent community of religious women, in whose convent he had found asylum; the *Angelus* chiming him a soft and solemn farewell, as, in the late leafless autumn, while the black Danube was swelling with the first rains of winter, and the forests were strewn with the yellow leaves that covered the grave of his dead sorrel, he went out from the solitudes of Monastica back to the living world.

CHAPTER V.

"AN IGNIS FATUUS GLEAM OF LOVE."

"IT was a superb thing—magnificent!"

The most popular personage in the English Cabinet was standing on the hearth-rug of his own library of his wife's château of Liramar, South Italy, where he had snatched a brief autumn holiday, nothing altered and little aged since some twenty years before when the beggared Border-lord, in the pride and liberty of his youth and his ruin, had won the great Minister's liking for life, by—a defiance.

Erceldoune laughed, a little impatiently.

"Nothing of the kind! Any other man in the service would have done the same; simplest duty possible."

"Simple duties get done in this world, do they? Humph! I didn't know it. I suppose you expected, when you gave the word to fire, that the brutes would kill you—eh?"

"Of course! I can't think now how they missed it. I ought to have been riddled with bullets, if they had aimed properly."

"I believe he's half disgusted he wasn't wholly dead, now!" said his lordship, plaintively. "It was a superb thing, I tell you; but don't you do it again, Erceldoune. The trash we write, to bully and blind one another, isn't worth the loss of a gallant man's life. *We* know that! A terrible fellow went and said so too, in the Commons, last session; he was up, and nobody could stop him. He told us, point blank to our faces, that though we *posed* very successfully for the innocent public, we might as well drop the toga and show the sock and buskin before each other, as the attitudinizing didn't take in the initiated, and must be a fearful bore always for us! Clever fellow. Tremendous hard hitter; but he wants training. By-the-way, the Principalities paid us down a heavy fine as indemnity for that outrage; half the money comes to you, clearly."

"I thank you, my dear lord, I have no need of it."

"Eh? What? I thought you were poor, Erceldoune?"

"I am; but I have never been in debt, and I want nothing. Besides, if you will pardon my saying so, I don't admire that system of 'indemnification,'" pursued Erceldoune, giving himself a shake like a staghound where he leaned against the marble mantle-piece. "A single scoundrel, or a gang of scoundrels, commits an insult, as in this case, on England, or any other great power, through the person of her representative, or perhaps merely through the person of one of her nation; the State to which the rascals belong is heavily mulcted, by way of penalty. Who suffers? Not the guilty, but the unhappy multitudes, peasants, traders, farmers, citizens, gentlemen —all innocent—who pay the taxes and the imposts! With an outrage from a great power, if accidentally committed on a traveler by a horde of thieves, you would take no notice whatever; if one were obviously done as a political insult, you would declare war. But when the thing happens in a small State, she is punished by an enormous fine, which half ruins her, for a crime which she could no more prevent than you can help in Downing Street the last wreckers' murder that took place in Cornwall. Pardon me, but I fail to see the justice or the dignity of the system; and for myself, when my own conviction is that the assassins who stopped me were not Moldavians at all, what compensation would it be to me to have the money wrung from a million or two guiltless people, whose country the cowards chose to select as their field? If you wish to avenge me, track the dastards, and give *them* into my power."

The statesman listened as they stood alone in the library, and looked at his guest, with humor lighting up his blue eyes.

"Erceldoune, if you hadn't that stiff-necked Scottish pride, which would make you knock me down, in all probability, if I offered it, I would give you three thousand a year to live with me and speak your mind," laughed his lordship, meaning his words too. "You are a miracle in your generation; you're not a bit like this age, sir; not a

whit more than the Napiers; you speak rarely, and never speak but the truth; you have to choose between your life and your trust, and, as a matter of course, give up your life; you are moneyless, and refuse money the State would tender you, because you think it gained 'neither by justice nor dignity;' you have dined at my house in town, you have stayed in my house in the country; you know that I like you, and yet you are the only man of my acquaintance who has never asked me for anything! On my life, sir, you don't do for this century."

"Unfit for my century, my lord, because I value your friendship, and honor your esteem too highly to regard both only as ladders to 'place!'"

The Minister stretched his hand out to him with one of those warm silent gestures of acknowledgment, very uncommon with him, but very eloquent. Too sweet and sunny a temper to be a "good hater," he was a cordial friend; how true and steadfast a friend those only knew who knew him in private life.

"Well, the State at least owes you something," he said, after a pause. "You must let us pay our debt. Messengerships never do lead to anything, but that is no reason why they should not in your person. There are many half civil half military appointments for which your life has fitted you, and which you yourself would fill better than any man I know; the governorship of some good island, for instance."

Erceldoune was silent a moment, leaning against the marble.

"I thank you sincerely, but I want nothing, and I have too much of the nomad in me to care to relinquish my wandering life in saddle. Give me no credit for asceticism, or renunciation; it is nothing of the kind. I should have been born a desert chief; I have never been happier than in the Kabyles' 'houses of hair,' living on maize and camel-flesh, and waiting for the lions through the night with the Zouaves and the Arabs. If you think, however, that I have really done enough to have earned any preference from England, I will ask you to send me on service, as soon as I am myself again, to South and East Europe, with your authorization to take leisure in returning if I

desire it, and full powers from the government to go to any expenses, or impress any assistance I require, if I should be able to discover the persons, or the track of the assassins."

"Certainly, you shall have both to the fullest extent. You shall have the authorization of the Crown to act precisely as you see fit; and spare no cost, if you can get on the villains' trail, in bringing them to justice. I fear you will be baffled: we don't know enough to identify them; they seconded us well in France, and everything was tried, but failed. It was in Paris you had seen the man whose voice you recognized, wasn't it? Would you know him again?"

Erceldoune ground his heel into the tiger skin of the hearth-rug as though his tiger foe were under his feet: he longed to have his hand on the throat of the silky murderous brute.

"I would swear to his voice and his laugh anywhere a score of years hence; and I should know him again, too: he was as beautiful as a woman, though I did not take his measure as I should have done had I guessed where we should meet."

"The object, of course, was purely political, and there are thousands of men—Carlists, Ultramontanists, Carbonarists, Reactionists, Socialists, and all the rest of the Continentalists—who would have held that they only obeyed their chiefs, and acted like patriots in shooting you down, for the sake of your papers. Well, you shall have your own way, Erceldoune, and all you ask—it is little enough! Lady George!" broke off his lordship, vivaciously, as a party from the billiard-room entered the library, "here is Erceldoune so enamored of the country he was murdered in, that he is asking me to have him sent off there again! These Messenger fellows are never quiet: he says he ought to be an Arab chief, and so he should be."

"He only wants the white haick to look like one," smiled Lady George, a lovely blonde, dropping her azure eyes on him with an effective side glance—wholly wasted.

Erceldoune, to his own infinite annoyance, had found himself an object of hero worship to all the brilliant beauties down at Liramar, where he had been bidden by the

great Minister as soon as he was able to leave Monastica, and where that unworn octogenarian was himself taking a rare short rest in the November of the year. His lordship was imperative in his summons to his favorite courier, to whom the southern air was likely to give back the lost strength which was still only returning slowly and wearily to muscles and limbs whose force had been "even as the lions of Libya."

The story of his single-handed peril, his choice of death rather than disloyalty to his trust, in the silent ravine of the Moldavian pine woods, had sent a thrill of its own chivalry through the languid, *nil admirari*, egotistic, listless pulses of high-bred society. Erceldoune was the hero of the hour if he chose; and the Border Eagle might have folded his strong pinions under the soft caress of a thousand white hands. But he did not choose: he had never cared for women—they had never gained any hold on him. Steeped in vice in his earliest years, sensuality had little power over his manhood; and the languid intrigues, the hollow homage, the "love" of the drawing-rooms—pulseless, insipid, artificial, frivolous, *paré à la mode*—were still more contemptible, and absolutely impossible to him. Nor was fashionable life to his taste: its wheels within wheels ill suited the singleness of his own character; the feverish puerility of its envies and ambitions woke no chord of sympathy in him; and its hot pressed atmosphere was too narrow, and too rarefied with heat and perfume, for the lungs which only breathed freely on the moorland and the prairie, on the ocean and the mountain side. A man once bound to the great world is a slave till the day of his death, and Erceldoune could not have lived in chains.

"You are very like one of the eagles of your own Border, Sir Fulke," said a French Duchesse at Liramar to him. She had been a beauty, and now, at forty, was a power—the customary development of a Frenchwoman.

"In love of liberty, madam, and solitude? Well, yes."

He thought how he and the golden eagle had fallen, much alike, and the thought crossed him vaguely, should he ever live to wish that the shot, like the eagle's, had told home?

"Yes, and if I were twenty years younger, I would tame you!" said the Duchesse, with a malicious smile. "Ah! how you would suffer, how you would beat your strong wings against the chains, how you would hate and worship, in one breath, your captor, and how you would pant out your great life in torture till you sank down at last in slavery as intense as your resistance!"

"*I!* You do not know me much, Miladi."

The Duchesse gave him a perfumy touch with her fan as she swept away.

"Bah! M. Erceldoune, I know your tribe and I know their tamers. You will find a worse foe than a bullet, soon or late. Your assassins were merciful to what your love will be—*when* you love. See if I am wrong!"

And with a laugh of compassion and of mocking prescience the prophetess of dark omen went to her whist-table, where she played as well as Prince Metternich; and Erceldoune passed on his way to the smoking-room, a contemptuous disdain working in him;—"love!" he had never known it, he had never believed in it, the frank boldness of his nature had been proof against most of its seductions, and he only recognized in it a sophistical synonym for women's vanity and men's sensuality, or *vice versa;* and, take it in the long run, he was undoubtedly right.

His passions were great; but they had never been fairly aroused; and he had, or thought he had, them under an iron bridle, like some Knight of St. John, half priest, half soldier, stern warrior and ascetic monk in one, his soul, like his body, mailed in steel, and wrestling with the vile tempters of the flesh, as with twining serpents that sought to wreathe round and stifle out his martial strength, and drag it downward into voluptuous fumes, and enervating shame, and weakness, that would disgrace his manhood and his pride, his order and his oath.

Yet vague, dreamy, half soft, half stormy thoughts swept over him of some love that this world might hold, with all the delight of passion, while loftier, richer, holier, than mere passion alone, which wakes and desires, pursues, possesses,—and dies. He believed it a fable; he was incredulous of its dominion; it was, he fancied, alien to

his nature; he neither needed nor accredited it; yet the dim glory of some such light that "never yet was upon sea or land," half touched his life in fancy for a second. For, where he sat in the lonely smoking-room, with the smoke curling up from the meerschaum bowl which had turned the bullet from his heart in Moldavia, and floating away to the far recesses of Rembrandtesque shade, out from the shadow there seemed to rise, with the luster in the eyes and the unspoken tenderness upon the lips, the face of the one who had saved him.

The face of a temptress or an angel?

Erceldoune did not ask, as he sat and dreamt of that memory called up from the depths of thought and shade; then he rose with an impatient disdain of himself, and strode out into the white, warm, Mediterranean night.

Had he refused to surrender his life to any living woman, only to have it haunted by a mere phantom-shape, an hallucination wrought from the fever fancies of a past delirium?

The great Minister went home; the gathering at Liramar remained with the hostess—Erceldoune with them; the sea breezes were bringing him back their old force into his limbs, and the mellow air was driving away the danger which for a time had threatened his lungs from the deep chest wound where the ball had lodged. In physics he did not believe—he never touched them; air and sea water were his sole physicians, and under them the fallen Titan rose again.

"I took too much killing!" he laughed to one of the men as they drifted down the waters lapping the sunny Sicilian shores, in the brief space which severs the day from the night. He had reported himself ready for fresh service, and the messenger who was to bring the Italian bag to Palermo would deliver him dispatches for the Principalities and Asiatic Turkey. Erceldoune was impatient to be on the move, and feel himself in saddle once more; while in inaction, too, he was no nearer on his quest—of those who had attacked his life, and of the one who had saved it. Phantom, hallucination, delirious memory, be it what it would, the remembrance which haunted him, and which he had no single proof was anything more tangible

than a fever-born fancy, was strong on him—the stronger the more he thrust it away. The woman who had rescued him, and who had since been lost to him in the darkness of mystery and the wide wilderness of the world, he could not recall, save by such intangible unsubstantiated recollection as had remained to him from unconsciousness; common reason told him that it could be but a folly which haunted the brain from the visions of his long peril, but reason failed to drive it out, or shake the first impression which had ever wakened or seized his imagination. The idea which pursued him, the face he had painted in the monastic solitude of the convent, had become to him a living reality; he resisted it, he trampled it out; not unfrequently he recoiled and shuddered from it, as from the phantasia of impending insanity; but it remained there. Her face rose before him from the sea depths, when he plunged down into the dark violet waves, and let them close above his head; he saw it with every gorgeous sunset that flushed the skies with fire; he remembered it with every hour he spent alone lying on the sands, or steering through the waters, or waiting with his rifle for the sea birds on the pine-crowned rocks. He could not banish it; and he used no sophism or half truths with himself; he knew that, vision or reality, whichever it was, it had dominion over him, and that the search he so thirsted to make for his assassins was not more closely woven with his thoughts than the quest of what was but "un ombre, un rêve, un rien"—a phantom and a shadow.

The boat dropped down the Mediterranean that night, while the sun was setting, drifting gently through the blue stretch of the waves, while the striped sails were filled by a west wind that brought over the sea a thousand odors from the far Levant, and the voices of the women idly chanted the "Ave Maria, Stella Virgine!" Erceldoune was stretched in the bottom of the boat, at the feet of a fair aristocrat, who leaned her hand over the leeward side playing with the water, and letting the drops fall, diamond bright as her rings, glancing at him now and then the while, and wondering, as she had wondered long at Liramar, what manner of man this was, who confessed himself poor and a mere courier, yet bore himself like a

noble; who had the blood of an ancient race, and the habits of a desert chief; who was indifferent and insensible to all women, yet had, for all, a grave and gentle courtesy, for the grape girl among the vineyards yonder, as for her, the patrician and the queen of coquettes, leaning here. He was unlike anything in *her* world—and Lady George would fain have roused in him the forbidden love which she, proud empress though she was, had learned, in her own despite, as her own chastisement.

But Erceldoune lay looking eastward at a lateen boat cutting its swift track through the waters; so little had her beauty ever caught his eyes, that he never even knew that he had roused her interest. Vanity he had absolutely none; and as for pride in such uncared-for, unsought victories, he would have as soon thought of being proud that a bright Sicilian butterfly had flown beneath his foot and been crushed by it.

"How beautifully she cuts her way!" he said to the man beside him. "Look how she dips, and lifts herself again—light as a bird! She will be past us like lightning."

Lady George glanced at her rival across the sea; how strange it was, she thought, that any man should live who could look at a lateen boat rather than at her!

"As with a bound
Into the rosy and golden half
Of the sky,

I suppose," she quoted listlessly.

Their own vessel floated lazily and slowly; the lateen craft came on after them, as he had said, turned into a pleasure boat, and draped with costliness, and laden with a fragrant load of violets gathered for distilling, piled high, and filling the air with odor. The skiff passed them swiftly;—half screened by the rich draperies, the tawny sails, and the purple mound of the violets, and turned half from them, and toward the western skies, as the boat flashed past, in the haze of light, he saw a woman.

With a loud cry he sprang to his feet, the vessel rocking and lurching under the sudden impulse;—he had seen the face of his dreams, the face of his savior. And the

lateen boat was cutting its swift way through the waves, away into the misty purple shadow out of reach, out of sight!

"Neuralgia?" said one of the men. "Ah! that is always the worst of shot wounds."

"You are ill?—you are in pain?" asked Lady George; and her voice was hurried and tremulous.

Erceldoune set his teeth hard, his eyes straining into the warm haze where the lateen boat was winging her rapid way, out of reach, while their own lay idly rocking on the waves.

"Pardon me—no," he said, in answer to them, for the man's nature was too integrally true to seek shelter under even a tacit acceptance of an untruth. "I saw one whom I recognized as having last seen in Moldavia the day the brigands shot me down. I fear that I foolishly startled you all?"

They thought it nothing strange that any link with the memory of his attempted assassination should have roused him; and he leaned over the boat's side following the now distant track of the light lateen skiff with his eyes,—silent in the wild reasonless joy, and the bitter baffled regret, which swept together through his veins. The face t at he had dreamed had bent over him in his anguish and extremity, was then a truth, a living loveliness, a life to be found on earth—no fever-born ideal of his own disordered brain; he had seen again, and seen now in the clearness of reason, the face of the woman who had been his ministering angel. Yet, as she had been lost to him then, so she was lost to him now; and as the sun sunk down below the waves, and the sudden southern night fell shrouding the Sicilian boat in its shadows, the phosphor light left in its track and the odor of its violet freight dying off from the sea and the air, he could have believed he had but been dreaming afresh.

Was he mad? Erceldoune almost asked himself the question as he leaned over the vessel's side looking down into the purple shadows of the water. High born, by the beauty of her face, and by the luxury with which that little skiff was decked, how should she have been in the wild solitudes of the Moldavian forest? Compassionate to his

peril and extremity, would she have cared nothing to know whether death or life had been at last his portion? —and could an act of such noble and pitying humanity have needed the veil of mystery and denial in which it had been shrouded by the serfs' repudiation of all knowledge that any save themselves had found him?

Yet, the face of which he had dreamed, he had seen now in the evening light of the Mediterranean—the mere phantom of a delirium could not have become vivid and living thus. A heavy oath was stifled in his teeth, as he stood with his eyes strained to pierce the cloudy offing. Why had he not been alone, that—a few yards more sail flung out to the winds, and his own hand upon the helm—his boat could have given chase down the luminous sea, and have swept away with hers, no matter at what cost of sand-reef or of shipwreck, into that golden mist, that twilight darkness!

CHAPTER VI.

THE WISDOM OF MOTHER VERONICA.

The pines were tipped with their lightest green, the torrents were swollen with the winter rains, the rafts were rushing, lightning like, down the rivers in the impetus that the spring lends to nature and to labor, to the earth and the human swarm it bears; primroses strewed every inch of ground under the boughs of the pine-woods; and the light of the young year was on the solitary hills and ravines as Erceldoune rode once more into Moldavia, through the same defile where his assassins had waylaid him.

He checked his horse, and wondered if the horrors of that wild night had been all a dream, as he looked down: the tumbling water glistened in the sunlight, the grass had grown in ranker luxuriance where the good bay was laid in her last resting-place; over the place where he had

fallen, bright clusters of spring flowers blossomed among the moss; two records of the night's work alone remained; the black and broken pine trunk that had been flung across the road, and had only been now lifted to one side, and a dark crimson stain, where the granite rock had been soaked and crusted with his life blood, too deeply for even the snows of winter wholly to wash out the shade it left. The most thoughtless man would have felt some shadow of earnestness steal on him in such a place, with such a memory; Erceldoune, though used to meet death in every shape, and too habituated to danger to ever feel its terror, let the bridle slacken on his stallion's neck, and gazed down on the wild ravine round him, with something of solemnity upon him—had the shot been one hair's breadth nearer his heart, he had now been rotting there with his dead horse; had she who had come as his guardian angel been one instant later, his eyes had now been blind to the light of the sun, and his life numbered with the vast nameless multitudes of the grave.

It was a strange unreal knowledge to the man in whose veins life swept with such eager vivid force, and in whose every breath and every limb strength was so vital, that life and strength both seemed eternal.

It was very still, here in the depths of the Danubian defile; and in the flood of sunset light he seemed to see the face of the woman he had lost. His heart went out to her with a futile, passionate longing; the pine-boughs that bent over him had shadowed her, the water that foamed at his feet had been touched by her hand; here his head had rested on her bosom, here his eyes had looked upward through the mists of agony to hers. The very grasses whispered of her; the very rocks were witness of his debt to her!

In madness with himself, in passionate thought of her, he dashed the spurs into his horse's flanks, and swept, full gallop, down the steep incline. Was *this* Love?

For a woman seen but twice, for a mere memory, for a loveliness, fugitive, nameless, dreamlike, mourned and lost!

In the first spring-time of the year, Holy Mother Veronica sat in her pleasant little chamber, which was paneled

with maple wood, and filled with early flowers, and delicate carvings, and the soft-hued heads of saints, and had as little of conventual gloom as though it had been a boudoir in a château rather than an Abbess's "cell" in Monastica; for they are no ascetics, but enjoy life in their way, those innocent, childlike, sunny-natured nuns of Moldavian Monastica.

Mother Veronica sat in deep thought, the sun upon her silvered hair, primroses and an antique vellum "Horæ" lying together in her lap—the fresh gifts of Nature with the worn manual of Superstition—venerable and happy in her serene old age. The primroses were untouched, the missal lay unread, Mother Veronica was looking out at the blue mountain line, and thinking of the stranger to whom she had felt almost that mother's tenderness which her life had not known, though in her eyes he was godless and a lost soul, a grand Pagan whom it was hopeless to save: thinking wistfully, for she believed that on earth she would never see him again. Suddenly she heard in the convent aisle without, the iron ring of a tread more like that of the Knights Templar, who had once held Monastica, than like the subdued slow step of her order;—she started and listened; could it be that the Virgin had heard her prayers, and allowed her to see the heathen who was, perchance, so wrongly dear to her? She hardly hoped it; yet she listened with longing anxiety. It was very sinful to so wish to behold the mere mortal life of a heretic!

But that he was such an infidel, Mother Veronica wholly forgot when the door unclosed, and a Sister ushered in Erceldoune.

"Ah, my son, the blessing of Heaven rest on you!" cried the Abbess, stretching out her hands with fervent welcome. "I never thought to see you here again. It is good—very good—to have remembered us, and come back from your great world to Monastica!"

"Far from it, madam," answered Erceldoune, bending lower to the simple venerable woman than he had ever bent to the patrician coquettes of Liramar. "It would be sorely ungrateful if I could enter Moldavia without seeing those to whom I owe it that I am not now rotting in its pine-woods."

"And you are recovered—entirely?"

"Entirely. My strength is wholly returned."

Her hands still holding his, Mother Veronica drew him nearer to the light, looking upward at him with as much pride and tenderness as though he had been her son by blood instead of by the mere title of the Church; then a sudden remembrance lightened her aged face and sunken eyes with all the innocent eagerness of a life which lives in solitude, where each chance trifle is a rare and wondrous event.

"Ah! my son—I forgot—I have so much to tell you. I have seen the woman of your picture!"

"*You have!* And she——?"

"She saved your life,—yes; but it is all so strange! Listen—I will tell you——"

"Do, for God's sake! And she——?"

"Oh, my son, do not take a holy name in vain for a woman's perishable beauty!" said Mother Veronica, with plaintive reproof, while Erceldoune crushed his heel into the maple-wood floor in a sore effort to contain his soul in patience. "It was about a month ago that a Salutation to the Virgin, to which, as you know, strangers come sometimes from Piatra, even sometimes as far as from Ronan and Jassy, I lifted my eyes during the service—I cannot tell how I came to do so wicked a thing—and I saw—ah! I thought I should have fainted!—in the shadow of another aisle, living before me, the glorious beauty that you painted in our altar-piece! I never sinned so deeply in my life before, but, though I never raised my eyes again, I thought of nothing but her all through the mass. If she tempted me so, how must she have tempted the souls of men! She is more lovely even than your portrait——"

"But her name—her country?" broke in Erceldoune, impatiently. "Why have withheld from me that she——"

"My son, I will tell all I know if you do not hasten me," pleaded Mother Veronica. "When the Salutation was over, Sister Eunice came and told me that a lady sought to see me; I bade her bring her here, and it was here I saw her—the woman of your picture, with those deep marvelous eyes, and that hair which is like light.

Ah! how wicked it is that a mere earthly beauty of form can touch us and win us as can never all the spiritual beauty of the saints. One sees at once that she is of noble rank, and young, but she is a woman of the world—too much a woman of the world! She apologized to me with a proud grace that the base born never can have, my son (though we ought to believe that the Father has made all equal), and said she came to ask about a stranger who had been succored by us in the autumn, and been cured of dangerous wounds; had he suffered much—had he been wholly restored? Then I knew that what we had deemed delirium had been the truth, and that this was she who had saved you; but I said nothing of that, only answered her fully of your illness and of your cure, and then added to her, as it were carelessly, that in your convalescence you had painted an altar-piece for Monastica—would she like to see it? She assented—she has a voice as low and rich as music—and I led her to the chapel, and pointed to the Virgin's altar, where it hangs. She went forward—and I saw her start; she gave a stifled cry, and then stood silent. She could not but see that it was her own beauty. I let her stand awhile, for I thought she was agitated; then I went forward, and said to her, 'He who painted that picture, my daughter, when he left it with me, said, "If you ever see a woman whose portrait you recognize in it, she will be the woman to whom I first owed the rescue of my life. Tell her Fulke Erceldoune waits to pay his debt." My daughter, you are she.' Her lips quivered a little though she answered me coldly. 'He said that? How could he have known?—how could he have remembered?' 'How well he remembered, my daughter,' I answered her, 'his painting says. Your words confess that you first saved this stranger's life; why conceal so noble an act of mercy?' She turned her eyes on mine, half mournfully, half haughtily. 'I had due reason. It was little that I did for this English traveler. My hound led me to him, and I found him, as I supposed, dying—left for dead, doubtless, by some forest brigands. I did what I could to revive him—it was scarce anything to name—and stayed with him while I sent my dog to bring assistance. That was all; it merited no gratitude, and I had

no thought that he would ever know it, since he was unconscious all the time I watched him.' 'But you were in peril, my daughter? If the brigands had returned——' Ah, my son, if you could have seen the proud beauty of her face as she smiled on me! 'Is life so beloved a thing, that we must be too great cowards to chance its loss when another is in extremity, and needs us?' The words were so courageous, and yet so mournful! She is as beautiful as the morning, but I fear she is not happy."

Erceldoune paced the little chamber to and fro for a second, his arms folded, his head bent, his heart moved to a strange softness and pain that his life had never known; then he paused abruptly before the Abbess.

"Her name! Tell me her name!"

"Alas, my son! I cannot."

"*Cannot!* Great Heaven! you never let her go unknown?"

"Do not be angered, my son. It was not in my power to prevent it; she chose it to remain secret. All I know is, that she let fall a gold perfume-box as she left my cell, and that as I lifted it, and sent Daughter Virginia with it after her, I saw engraven on the lid one word only—'Idalia.'"

"Idalia!"

He repeated the word with passionate tremulous eagerness; it seemed to him the sweetest poem poets could ever dream, the fairest echo that ever the world heard, the treasury of all that womanhood could give of beauty, grace, and love, that single Greek name of the woman he pursued; yet,—it could serve him in nothing.

"Idalia!—Idalia! That will do nothing to find her? Oh, my God! she is lost to me as she was lost in Sicily!"

The words were more full of bitterness than any she had ever heard wrung from him by his physical anguish, while he paced up and down the narrow chamber.

"It is very strange; but indeed it was no fault of mine," pleaded the Abbess, a little piteously, for she saw that it was a heavy blow to him, and she dreaded alike to see the pain or the wrath of that unchastened Pagan nature before which the Mother Superior, used only to deal with and chasten or solace the untroubled souls of guileless women,

whose heaviest sin was an omitted prayer, felt helpless. "And perhaps it is for the best that you should not know where to seek her, for hers is a wondrous sorcery, and it might be a fatal snare; if it is such a delight of the eyes to me, what might it be to you? It is not well to see anything of a mere human earthly charm so glorious as that."

Erceldoune stretched his hand out with an irrepressible gesture.

"But surely you told her, at the least, how great I held the debt I owe to her?—how deeply I felt her humanity, her heroism, her self-devotion to a stranger? How——"

"I told her, my son, that in all your delirium you spoke but of her, and that on awaking to consciousness your first question was for her, even as the first effort of your strength was to paint her own loveliness upon the canvas; and she heard me silently, and seemed profoundly moved that you should have thus remembered her," pursued innocent Mother Veronica, placidly, unwitting in her serenity that she was but "heaping fuel to the burning," while where Erceldoune leaned in the shadow his face flushed hotly again. Spoken out in the calm words of the Superior, his passionate memory of an unknown woman looked more wild and more tender than he liked that anything of his should look. "I spoke of you as I felt," went on Mother Veronica; "and she seemed to like to hear all, which was but natural, since she saved your life, and found you so cruelly injured in the forest; though she said that you owed her little, and that the dog had done more for you than she had. She looked long at the painting. 'The English stranger has honored me too much,' she said at last; 'and so, holy mother, have you. The portrait—*my* portrait—should not be chosen for any altar-piece. Hang it, rather, in the shadow, with that Guido's Magdalen.' And with those words, my son, she bade me farewell; and I felt, all sinful though it was to feel such a thing for a mere mortal creature, as though the light had sunk out of Monastica when she was gone. Ah! just such beauty must have been the beauty of the glorified Dorothëa, when she brought the summer roses and the golden fruit of Paradise at midnight to the stricken unbeliever!"

Erceldoune stood long silent, leaning against the embrasure, with his head bent; except under the immediate impulse of passion, many words were not natural to him.

"Is she married?" he said, suddenly, after a lengthened pause.

"I cannot tell, my son. She said nothing of herself. Her dress is rich, her manners noble. I know no more. She had many rings upon her left hand; one of them might be her marriage ring. That she is not happy, I am certain."

Erceldoune crushed a bitter oath to silence. Not even to know this of her!

"Can I see the picture in the chapel?"

"Surely, my son. Do we not owe it to your art and your gift?"

His step woke the hollow echoes of the arched aisles as it rang on the stone pavements, and he passed into the chapel, far famed through all the Danubian Principalities for its antiquity, its riches, and its architecture, which closely resembled that of the Bohemian Chancery at Vienna. It was cool and dark and still, the glass stained with deep and glowing hues, the lofty arches stretching on till they were lost in gloom; and the face of his own painting, with its brilliant light, looked down like that of an angel from out the depths of shade. Thus had he seen her,—and seen only to lose her once more,—in the violet shadows and the falling night of the Sicilian seas.

Erceldoune stood there long, and in silence, as before him a Templar, leal to his monastic oath through half a lifetime, might have stood before the same altar, seeing in the virginal beauty of some sacred artist's painted thought only the loveliness of the woman before whom the asceticism of the soldier, priest, and anchorite had flung down sword and shield and cross, and bowed and fallen.

The Abbess Veronica looked at him with an earnest sadness, then went and laid her hand on his arm:

"Do not think so much of her, my son; it may be she is not worthy of it. A beauty divine she has; but it is not always in those of fairest form that the divine spirit rests. There is mystery with her; and where there is mystery, my son all is not well. I doubt me if she be what

you deem her. The belladonna is beautiful, but living in darkness, and loving the shade, it brings only poison and death. Take to your bosom that flower alone, which lives in the clearness of light, and folds no leaves unopened from your eyes."

He gave a movement of impatience, but he answered nothing: it was not in him to take shelter beneath denial, when to give the lie would have been to lie, and he turned and walked up and down the aisle, where, a few months before, the living presence of the woman he sought had been, his tread re-echoing through the silent chapel, in which the step of man had never been heard since the days of the Temple Knights. And as he went, pacing slowly to and fro in the religious solitudes, he saw nothing but the face above the Virgin's altar—the face of the woman on whose heart he had rested, from whose hand he had drunk the living waters of life, and yet who was lost to him—a stranger and untracked—in the wide wilderness of the world.

He stayed that night at Monastica.

The nuns were innocent as children, and though reluctant to receive a male guest, entertained him cheerfully, once admitted. He was reluctant to leave the place where at least one could speak to him of the woman whose memory was so dear, where at least her presence once had been, and still seemed to him to sanctify the very stones that she had trodden. Mother Veronica made him welcome with almost a mother's devotedness; this strong, fiery, lawless heathen, as she held him, had grown very dear to her, and having eased her conscience by warning him, she could no longer resist the temptation, so strong in a monotonous and one-idea'd life, of dwelling on the romance and mystery of the single episode which had broken the even tenor of her days. He listened over and over again to the same words, never wearying of them, for he was in love with his own ideal as utterly as any lad of twenty. In the pause between her religious services, in the hush of the spring-tide, while she walked with him in the still convent gardens, and at the supper she shared with him in her pretty little cell, with its maple wood, its sunny pictures and its fresh primroses, that had nothing

of the recluse, as the meal had nothing of the ascetic in its frothing chocolate, golden honey, milk-white cakes, dainty river fish, and newly laid eggs, the Abbess spoke incessantly and garrulously of but one theme. She did penance for the indulgence every ten minutes, it is true, by a gentle little pleading sermon against the desire of the eye, the perishableness of earthly beauty, and the danger of erring idolatry; but the penance done, she perpetually nullified it by dwelling, in all her innocent unwisdom, on every grace, on every word, on every charm of the woman against whom, nevertheless, she tenderly warned him. Every syllable she uttered heightened a hundredfold the sorcery which his lost savior's memory had for him, and all her simple warnings drifted past his thoughts unheard. A child's hand will sooner stop the seas, when they rise in their wrath, than counsels of caution or of prudence arrest the growth of a great passion.

"Idalia!"

That solitary word seemed all he could see or hear as he sat in the twilight, while the mist slowly stole over the bright primroses, the sculptured ivory Passion, and the silver I. H. S. that glistened on the draperies of the Mother Superior's peaceful altar, as it had once done on the *labarum* of the Constantines.

"Idalia!"

It seemed to fill the night, that single name of the shadow he pursued, as Erceldoune stood on the balcony that ran round the convent, alone, while all around him slept, while the great forests stretched away on every side into the darkness, burying in them the little Swiss-like châlets, in each of which there dwelt, according to Moldavian custom, one nun alone; safe in that lonely wilderness, though with no guardian but her own sanctity.

The stars were bright, the murmurs of innumerable torrents filled the silence, the heavy odors of a million pines rose up from below, and over the far Danubian plains the woods trembled as though stirred by the shadowy hosts of Persian myriads and of Scythian chiefs, of Roman legions and of Avar hordes, whose bones had whitened in their eternal sands, and whose graves were locked in their funereal depths. It was profoundly still, while from the con-

vent tower the midnight strokes fell slowly, beating out the flight of Time, that in its merciless eternal movement had left of the Great King but the writing on the wall, but the mute story of Assyrian stones; and that had swept down, like insects of a summer day, the mailed and mighty cohorts who once had passed the windings of the Ister, with the shouts of "Ave Cæsar Imperator!" proudly heralding the passage of the last Constantine. Where were they—the innumerable Peoples of the Past?

Where were they?—bright Greek and delicate Persian, ravening Hun and haughty Latin, swift Scythian and black-browed Tartar, brute Mogul and patrician Roman, whose bones lay buried there, unmarked, unparted, in the community of the grave?

The Danube rolled along its majestic waters, while centuries and cycles passed; sweeping onward under the same suns that once flashed on the diadem of Darius; flowing in solemn melody through the night under the same stars which the wistful eyes of Julian once studied in the still lonely watches of his tent. The river was living still, dark and changeless, rushing ever onward to the sea; but they, the fleeting and innumerable phantoms, the Generations of the Dead, were gone for evermore.

As he stood there in the midnight solitude, it seemed to him as if, in the midst of his virile and adventurous life, he suddenly paused for the first time, and thought itself paused with him; it was because he was, for the first time, a dreamer—for the first time a lover.

Something of melancholy, of foreboding, were on him; the world for once seemed weary to him; he wondered why men lived only to suffer and to die. In all his years before he had never felt this; they had been filled with rapid action and vigorous strength, finding their joys in the close conflict of peril, in the mere sense of abundant and powerful life, in the victories of an athlete wrestling breast to breast with the lion or bear, and in the swift sweep of a wild gallop through jungles of the tropics, or cold crisp dawns of northern moorlands. Now he knew that his life was no longer under his own governance; now he knew that the vague fantasy of a baseless dream was dearer to him than anything the earth held. It had its sweetness

and its bitterness both: she lived; she had remembered him; she was not happy; this was all he knew, but it was enough to fill the night with her memory, and from those brief words to build a world.

His imagination had never awakened before, but now his fancies thronged with dreams, wild as a youth's, vague as a poet's, and dazzling as

Fireflies tangled in a silver braid.

Thus, before him, in the Danubian solitudes, once the battle-field of nations, the Persian of the Immortal Guard had thought of some gazelle-eyed Lydian, seen once, never to be forgot, in the Temple of the Sun; the wild Bulgarian had felt his savage eyes grow dim with tears of blood when the Byzantine arrow pierced his breast, and he remembered some Greek captive, loved as tigers love, who never again would lie within his arms, and to whose feet he would never bring again the pillage of the palace and the trophies of the hunt; the Roman Legionary leaning on his spear, on guard, while the cohorts slept in their black frozen camp, had dreamed of a gold-haired barbarian far away in the utmost limits of the western isles, whom he had loved under the green shadows of fresh Britannic woods, as he had never loved the haughty Roman matron who bore his name where tawny Tiber rolled. Thus, before him, men had mused, in those forsaken solitudes, of the light of a woman's smile, of the softness of a woman's memory, where, standing in the silence of the night, he heard the fall of the torrents thunder through the stillness, and watched the black pines tower upward into the starlighted gloom. Nations had perished on those shadowy battle-plains; but the same river rolled unchanged, and unchanged the same dreams of passion dreamed themselves away.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BADGE OF THE SILVER IVY.

It was midnight and midwinter in Paris, snow lying thick on the ground; dead lying thick in the Morgue; outcasts gnawing the bones dogs had left, and shivering on church steps built by pious crowds, who glorified God and starved their brethren; aristocrats skimming over the ice, flashing their diamonds in the torchlight, warm in their swansdown and ermine; wretches who dared be both poor and honest, sleeping, famine-stricken, under bridge-arches, as such a twin insult to a wise world deserved; philosophers, male and female, who were vile, and got gold, and *joliment jouaient leurs mondes*, drinking Côte and Rhine wines, and laughing at life from velvet couches. It was a bitter icy night, and the contrasts of a great city were at their widest and sharpest, as the chiffonnier searched in the snow for offal as treasure, and the Princess lost in the snow, as a mere bagatelle, wealth in an emerald that would have bought bread for a million; as a young child, half naked, sobbed, homeless, under the pitiless cold, and a State Messenger, wrapped in furs, was rolled in his traveling carriage through the bright gaslit streets. The Royal Courier was lying, stretched nearly at length on his carriage-bed, while he dashed through the capital full speed, not losing a moment to get through to Persia.

There was plenty of time to sleep while the train tore through the night to Marseilles, and he raised himself on his arm and looked out at the old familiar, welcome streets of Paris; a mistress for every new-comer, a friend to every well-worn returning traveler, a syren ever fresh, ever dear, ever unrivaled. As he did so, the carriage was passing down the Rue Lépelletier and before the Opéra, where the doors had just opened for one of those balls to which all Paris proper (or improper) flocks. The throng was great; the wheel of his carriage nearly locked in another, whose

gas-lamps, flashing off the snow, lighted up the face of a woman within, with the azure of sapphires glancing above her brow. The Queen's Messenger started up from his carriage-couch and threw himself forward; his postboy saved the collision, his horses dashed on without a pause.

He flung himself back among his furs, with a fierce bitterness in his soul:

"Good God, again!—and *there!*"

The carriage whirled on, leaving the masked throngs to flock to the wild Rigolboche of the Opera.

That night under the glitter of a chandelier in the Hotel Mirabeau, before a fire which flung its warmth over the green velvet and walnut wood, the ormolu and silver, the mirrors and consoles of the chamber, two men sat smoking over claret and olives, having dined alone, by a miracle, in the midst of the laughing, dazzling, contagious gayeties of peopled Paris. In these days confederates meet over liqueurs and cigarettes, instead of in subterranean caverns; and conspirators plan their checkmates in the coffee-room, an opera-box, or a drive to an imperial stag-hunt, instead of by midnight, under masks, and with rapiers drawn.

One of the men was Victor Vane, the other that dashing Free Lance, that Monodist of the Sugared Violet, that political brigand of the Carpathian Pass, to whom the telegram had been addressed as to the Count Conrad Constantine Phaulcon: a man in physical beauty, physical prowess, talent, wit, and bearing, far the superior of the Englishman, yet whom the latter dominated and held in check, simply by that fine and priceless quality, which is colorless because inscrutable, and irresistible because prévoyant—Acumen. It crowns genius, and dethrones kings.

Socially, there was the same anomaly between them. Vane, of whose antecedents none knew very much (except that his mother had been a Venetian, wedded, but not of very fair fame, and his father a decayed English gentleman, chiefly resident in Naples, both of whom had been dead long ago), with no title, with no connections with a somewhat notorious association with the ultra parties of Southern Europe, and with no particular quality of social distinction beyond his perfect breeding, his scientific whist, and his inimitable tact, was, nevertheless, seen at all courts

save those of Vienna and the Vatican, and had made himself not only received, but welcomed in many of the best families and highest sets in all countries. Phaulcon, on the other hand, in whose veins ran blood of purest Hellenic breed, who could trace his chain of descent unbroken, who had a marvelous beauty, a marvelous grace, and a marvelous tact, with many other gifts of fortune and nature, was contraband of courts, had long since been exiled from "good society;" and was considered, rightly or wrongly, to belong to the Bohemian class of Free Lances, the Chevaliers d'Industrie of politics, the wild lawless Reiters of plot and counterplot, of liberalism and intrigue, who are the abomination of the English mind (which commonly understands not one whit about them), and are the arch disturbers of continental empires, where the peoples recognize at the bottom of all their schemes and crimes the germ and memory of one great, precious, living truth and treasure—Liberty. At the core, both these men were as deeply dyed, and as utterly unscrupulous, the one as the other, the only difference being that the one was the more wilily dangerous, the other the more visibly lawless; both deserved equally to be out of the presence-chamber of princes and the pale of aristocratic cliques, yet Vane was accepted as a man of fashion by the most fastidious, Phaulcon was excluded by the least fastidious, as among the "equivocal." What made the difference?

Victor would have told again, with his charming low laugh, that when quiet on his lips was always in his sunny eyes, which dazzled women and never met men fairly—"Acumen!"

"I cannot imagine how you could miss him!" he was saying now, breaking a macaroon, with a slight superb disdain in his tone, as of a man who never missed anything.

"How should I know?" cried Phaulcon, with petulant impatience. "We fired half a dozen balls at him, the man fell dead, never stirred, never breathed; who on the face of the earth could imagine he was going to get up again?"

"Carissimo," said Vane, with soft persuasion. "Why *will* you persist in that most deleterious habit of trusting

to chance, and satisfying yourself with 'appearances' and with 'beliefs'? Nothing more fatal. Always make sure. Just a farewell plunge of an inch of steel into the aorta, and you are always certain."

The picture-like beauty of Phaulcon's face reddened with a momentary flush, and he tossed back his long hair.

"Parbleu! one is not an assassin?"

"Since when have you discovered that?"

The flush grew darker on Count Conrad's forehead; he moved restlessly under the irony, and drank down a draught of red fiery Roussillon without tasting it more than if it had been water. Then he laughed; the same careless musical laughter with which he had made the requiem over a violet—a laugh which belonged at once to the most careless and the most evil side of his character.

"Since sophism came in, which was with Monsieur Cain, when he asked, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' It was ingenious that reply; creditable to a beginner, without social advantages. 'An assassin!' Take the word boldly by the beard, and look at it. What is there objectionable?"

"Nothing—except to the assassinated."

"It has had an apotheosis ever since the world began," pursued Phaulcon, unheeding, in his bright vivacity. "Who are celebrated in scripture? Judith, Samuel, David, Moses, Joab. Who is a patriot? Brutus. Who is an immortal? Harmodius and Aristogiton. Who is a philosopher? Cicero, while he murmurs '*Vixerunt!*' after slaying Lentulus. Who is a hero? Marius, who nails the senators' heads to the rostræ. Who is a martyr? Charles, who murders Strafford. What is religion? Christianity, that has burnt and slain millions. Who is a priest? Calvin, who destroys Servetus; or Pole, who kills Latimer, which you like. Who is a saint? George of Cappadocia, who slaughters right and left. Who is a ruler? Sulla, who slays Ofella. Who is a queen? Christina, who stabs Monaldeschi; Catherine, who strangles Peter; Isabella, who slays Moors and Jews by the thousand. Murderers all! Assassination has always been deified; and before it is objected to, the world must change its creeds, its celebrities, and its chron-

icles. 'Monsieur, you are an assassin,' says an impolite world. 'Messieurs,' says the polite logician, 'I found my warrant in your Bible, and my precedent in your Brutus. What you deify in Aristogiton and Jael, you mustn't damn in Ankarström and me.' Voilà! What could the world say?"

"That you would outwit Belial with words, and beguile Beelzebub out of his kingdom with sophistry," laughed Vane, with a quiet lazy enjoyment. "Caro, caro! with such exquisite subtleties in speech, how is it that you are so uncertain in acts, so rash even occasionally, and so—just now and then—so weak?"

Phaulcon laughed too.

"Because, intellectually, I am quite a devil, but morally, perhaps, keep a pin's point of humanity still. I am ashamed of it, but what would you have? Achilles could be shot in the heel."

And there was the very slightest shadow of bitterness in the words, which showed that there was a "pin's point," too, of truth in them. Vane looked at him with his quiet amusement undisturbed.

"And your delicate susceptibilities will let you shoot a man but not stab him? What an artist's eyes for imperceptible shades of color!"

And it was with that gentle mocking banter that he had killed—perseveringly and remorselessly killed—any lingering touches of nobler things, any stray instincts toward holier impulses, that he had found in that unscrupulous, brilliant, lawless Free Lance, who laughed now with an evil glitter in his eyes, and a sense of ridicule and shame for the single impulse that had moved him with something true and human.

"Madre di Christo! shot or steel, I would have given him either willingly enough when he outwitted us. Curse him! if ever we come across each other, it shall go worse with him for that trick."

"Oh no," interposed Victor, languidly. "No, certainly not, let him alone. Never *kill* save when there is necessity; besides, any row between him and you might draw attention to that little affair, and though we must make the sacrifice of those unpleasant trifles to *la haute politique*,

it does not do for them to get wind. They do not dream we were in it. They have plenty of toy-terriers, and yapping puppies, and truffle-dogs with a good nose for a perquisite at the English Foreign Office, but they have no bloodhounds in the bureau—they can't *track*. Apropos of tracking—I tell you who I wish were more completely pledged to us——"

"Lilmarc, of course. So do I, but he is caution itself; and I believe, on my faith, that a white wand at Vienna would buy up what little Magyar spirit there is in him. He is a fox, with the heart of an ape!"

Lilmarc was the Gräf von Lilmarc, an Hungarian noble of splendid possessions, and of wavering allegiance—now to Austria, and now to his Fatherland. Vane trifled gravely with his olives.

"But Lilmarc has one weakness—women. Cannot the Countess Vassalis seduce him?"

Phaulcon gave a despairing shrug of his shoulders.

"There is no reliance on women! I don't know what has come to Idalia of late; she is not herself, and is oftener dead against us now than anything else. I have asked her to make play with Lilmarc; she might have him in her hands like wax in no time, but she will not; she is wayward, cold, haughty——"

"Perhaps she has taken a lover you know nothing about," said Victor, with a smile in his eyes. He liked his friend and confederate as well perhaps as any one in the world, but he liked better still tormenting him.

The blood flushed Phaulcon's forehead.

"If I thought that——" Then he laughed the melodious laugh which was in harmony with the reckless poetic grace of the man's beauty. "Oh, no! She only sees through us, and has found out that our sublime statue of Liberty has very clay feet. *Moitié marbre et moitié boue*, as Voltaire said of the Encyclopédie."

"Why do you let her see the clay feet, then?"

"Why? Idalia is not a woman that you can blind. You have not seen her."

"Unhappily, no! I have heard men rave of her, as they never raved of anything, I think; and I know how madly they have lost their heads for her—to our ad-

vantage. Miladi's loveliness has done more for the cause than half our intrigues. She is now at Naples?"

"She was; to-night she is in Paris."

"In Paris?"

"Yes; I thought you knew it? In half an hour I am going back to take her to the opera ball. Lilmarc is sure to be there, and she must beguile him out of his reticence and caution if she can; there is not a better place for enticing Tännhauser into the Venusberg than *en domino* in an opera box, while all the world is going mad below."

"*D'avance*, I am jealous both of Lilmarc and of you!" cried Vane, with that easy worldly serenity to which such a normal and barbaric passion as jealousy seems wholly antagonistic and impossible. "At last I shall see her, then—your beautiful Vassalis! Shall I come with you?"

"No; better come up to the box when Lilmarc is not there. If he saw you with her he might take fright and cry off; if you have an ivy spray at your button-hole she will understand and admit you, whether I be there or not. Here!" With the words he opened a small, long bonbon-box he took from his coat, and tossed Vane one of the little sprays of silver ivy that it held—the badge which all those who would be recognized by Idalia, Countess Vassalis, must wear on their dominoes that night.

"Thanks," said Victor, as he slipped it in his waistcoat-pocket. "I shall be there by one o'clock at latest. Idalia—this wonderful Idalia!—how often I have missed her, how often I have longed to see her; the fairest conspirator in Europe!"

The Bal de l'Opéra was brilliant, crowded, dizzy, mad with the very insouciant and reckless gayety of the Prince who invented it, as though the spirit of Philippe d'Orléans still presided over the revelries. Dominoes here, dominoes there; gold spangles, silver spangles, rose and white, blue and amber, violet and gray, scarlet and black, mock jewels flashing like suns and glancing like stars, "*débardeurs*" and "*grands bébés*," Pierrots and Scaramouches, white shoulders and black masks, fluttering rosettes and dainty signal-roses, were all pell-mell in glittering tumult and contagious riot; and Vane, in a domino of imperial blue, with the silver ivy spray fastened on his shoulder, made his way

through the crowd, not dancing, not heeding much the invitations, mockeries, and whispers of a score of charming masks, but looking incessantly upward at the boxes.

He did not see what he looked for; but he did see every now and then, till they had numbered more than a dozen, on an Ottoman, on a Knight of Malta, on a Pharaoh, on a Poissarde, on a black domino, on a scarlet, on a purple, on a violet, the little spray of ivy like his own, that had come out of Phaulcon's bonbon-box.

"Che, che, ch-e-e!" murmured Victor, with the southern expletive. "Miladi Idalia will have a large gathering. Is she as beautiful as they say?—one would think so, to judge by her power."

He got as much out of the press as he could, and moved on in silence, heeding nothing of the *cancan d'enfer* and *chaine du diable* dancing round him. He was not a man who cared for noisy dissipations; they had no sort of attraction for him; indeed, dissipation at all had not much, unless it were associated with the intricacies of intrigue. He cared for nothing that was not *rusé;* his own life was emphatically so; he had begun it with serious disadvantages: first of birth, which, though gentle on one side, was not distinguished; of fortunes which were very impoverished; of prospects which were absolutely *nil;* of a world in which he had no place, and which had no want of him; of a temperament that was intensely ambitious, intensely dissatisfied, and intensely speculative. Despite all these drawbacks, by dint of tact and finesse, he had now, when he was but thirty, moved for many years in some of the best society of Europe; he lived expensively, though he was very poor; and he was deferred to, though no one could have said why they gave him such a preference. He had the spirit of the gambler, with the talent of the statesman, and he found the world one great gaming-table. He could not be a statesman in his own country; England will not accept as statesmen what she is pleased to term "adventurers," whereby she loses all men of genius, and gets only trained men of business: hence he had thrown himself, partly in pique, more in ambition, into the interests of a certain *ultra* political party abroad. Bred in Venetia, he hated Austria with a cold but very virulent hatred.

Rash only in the height and unscrupulousness of his ambitions, he adopted politics—or, perhaps, to give them their true and naked name, conspiracies—as the scaling-ladder for his own advancement. If all the waters round him were lashed into a tempest, he knew so cautious and tried a swimmer as himself would have a fair chance to come uppermost while other men went down. He loved intrigue for mere intrigue's sake, and power for the simple pleasure of holding it. Serene, sunny, impassive, and even indifferent in bearing, and, indeed, in temperament, he could seize savagely, and hold pitilessly. In deceiving any one, Vane had no sort of scruple—it was only an artistic kind of exercise; but kill anybody, or provoke anybody, he would not think of doing—it was a barbaric, blundering style of warfare. He never went out of his way in wrath; but all the same, he never missed his way to revenge. He had a good deal of ice in his nature; but it was, perhaps, the most dangerous of ice—that which smiles in the sun, and breaks, to drop you into the grave. In the world of fashion, Victor was *but* a man of fashion—popular, very successful with women, an admirable tactician, and a guest who brought his own welcome everywhere by his easy social accomplishments, and his languid gentle temper, which had over and over again smoothed a quarrel, prevented an embarrassment, hushed a provocation unuttered, and arranged a misunderstanding before it grew to a rupture. In that world unseen, which revolves under the rose, he was very much more than this, and had a sway and a place of considerable influence in a society of politicians whose members are in all classes and orders, and whose network spreads more widely and finely beneath society than society dreams, stretching from Paris to Sicilia, and from the Quadrilateral to the Carpathians, in their restless scheming for the future, and their plans for the alteration of the map of Europe. It was not, however, of the French in Rome, the White Coats in Venice, the Muscovites in Warsaw, or the state of siege in Galicia, that he was thinking now, as he went through the wild, panting, crushed crowd of dancers at the French Opera; it was of something far fairer, if equally dangerous—a woman.

"Is she here?" he asked a violet domino, who wore, like himself, the badge of silver ivy.

"No. Perhaps she will not come, after all!"

"Oh yes, she will."

"How do you know? Have you seen her?"

"No, I never saw her. But Conrad has been dining with me, and left me to go and fetch her."

The violet domino went on, without a word.

"He's in love with her, too; he can't speak of her without a tremor in his voice; and by his voice he is nobody less than Prince Carlo himself," thought Vane, glancing back at his silver ivy, in apprehension lest it should be torn off or stolen in the press. "What can her power be? Ah, bah! What was that of the L'Enclos? Nobody knew, but nobody resisted."

And he went on, humming to himself Scarron's quatrain:

"Elle avait au bout de ses manches,
Une paire de mains si blanches;
Que je voudrais en verité,
En avoir été souffleté!"

"Ah! there she is!"

The stifled exclamation fell on his ear, low spoken but impulsively passionate, as only a lover's entranced recognition is. He turned, and saw a mask in Venetian costume, to whose shoulder was also fastened the little badge of ivy.

"One of us! Who, I wonder? He, too, cannot speak of her without betraying himself," thought Victor, as he swung round quickly, and glanced over the boxes. In one of them he saw what he sought: with black laces and azure silks sweeping about her, caught here and there with sprays of silver ivy, a woman masked, who, leaning her arm on the front of the box, and her cheek upon her hand, gazed down into the tumult of color and of movement that made up the ball below. Her face was unseen, but the lips, exquisite as the lips of a Greuze painting, had a certain proud weariness on them; and in the bright richness of her hair, in the elegance of her hand and arm, in the languor and grace of her attitude and her form, there were sufficient sureties of the beauty that would be seen if the black mask that veiled it were removed.

The Venetian domino looked at her long, then, with a stifled sigh, turned away.

"You have loved her?" whispered Vane.

The domino started, and glanced at the ivy branch on Victor's arm.

"To my cost," he said bitterly, as he plunged among the whirling dancers, and was lost in the spangled and riotous multitude.

His hearer smiled. A woman who owned a limitless power, and was unscrupulous, and without pity in its use, was, perhaps, the only woman he was capable of respecting. Cold as he was, and but little accessible to anything of passion, for which his blood ran too suavely and too tranquilly, he felt something of warm, eager curiosity sweep over him, and his pulse beat a shade quicker with a new expectation. He had long heard of this sorceress—he had never seen her; and he threaded his way with impatience through the Arléquins, Pierrots, masks, and costumes, till he reached the stairs, and mounted them lightly and rapidly toward the box, opened the door, and entered.

It was filled with dominoes, all decorated with the silver spray, and all bending toward her with eyes that told their admiration through their masks, and voices that murmured flatteries, homage, and wit—to an inattentive ear. She lifted her head, and turned slightly as the door unclosed; her eyes dwelt on him through her mask, noting the badge he wore. She bowed languidly.

"Enter, monsieur."

And Victor Vane, all-impassive diplomatist, all-rusé man of the world though he was, felt a thrill run through him, and a hot breath seem to pass, sirocco-like, over his life, as he heard the nameless magic of that melodious lingering voice, and found himself, for the first time, in the presence of that Queen of the Silver Ivy, who was known as—Idalia.

Could Erceldoune have seen afar as Surrey saw his mistress, the magic glass would not have brought him such secure and happy peace as came with the vision of Geraldine. Late into the dawn as the night express plunged through the heart of France downward to where Marseilles lay beside the southern sea, through the cold clear night, the plains white with sheeted snow, the black and spectral woods, and the sleeping hamlets, with the pointed towers of châteaux and manoirs rising against the leaden clouds,

behind him the City that Julian loved sparkled under a million lights; strangely altered since the days when Julian wrote in adoring phrase of the studious and tranquil retirement of his austere and beloved Lutetia. The bright tide of Parisian life was at its gayest in the first hours of the midwinter morning; and in one of its richest quarters an opera-supper was at the height of its wit and of its brilliancy. The guests had come from the Opera ball, the dominoes, sparkling with silver violets, gold bees, diamond clusters, and glittering stars, were tossed down on the couches with the Venetian masks; being no tinsel costumes of the Passage des Panoramas, hired for a night, but the silk and satin elegancies of a court costumier, for men who wore these trifles at the masked fêtes of the Tuileries, in the Colonna palace in Carnival, and at the Veglione with noble maskers of Florence. The supper-room was a long and handsome chamber, hung with rose silk, flowered with silver, with crystal chandeliers, flashing globes of light, and with a meal of the choicest extravagance on the table, about which half a dozen men and but one woman were gathered.

She—alone there at the head of her table, with her bouquet lying idly by her little army of deep claret-glasses, broad champagne goblets, and tiny spiral mousselines for liqueurs—was well worth a host of women less fair. Marie de Rohan—when Buckingham and Holland and Lorraine, and all that glittered greatest at two Courts were at her feet, and even the Iron Cardinal, in the censure of his blackest enmity, could not wholly keep his eyes from being dazzled by the shine of the arch-intriguer's golden hair—was not more beautiful than she. Many would have added, also, that the Duchesse de Chevreuse was not more dangerous.

That her form and her face were perfect, was not half nor a tithe of her resistless charm; it lay in still more than these, in every glance of her eyes, blue-black like the gazelle's, in every slight smile that crossed her proud lips, in all the sunlit luster on her hair, in all the attitudes of her southern grace, in every movement, accent, and gesture of one who knew to its uttermost the spells of her power, and was used to have that power courted, flattered, and obeyed. Her

loveliness was very great; but, great as it was, it was comparatively forgotten beside so much that was of still rarer fascination; the patrician ease, the silver wit, the languor and the laughter, the dignity and the nonchalance, the brilliance and the eloquence which turn by turn gave their changing sorcery to her. The innocence and fawn-like shyness of a young girl in her earliest spring may be charming in a pastoral, but in real life they are but awkward and tame beside the exquisite witchery, the polished insouciance, the careless disdain, the cultured fascination of a woman of the world. And these were hers in their utmost perfection; a woman of the world she was in the utmost meaning of the words, and all of victory, of power, and of beguilement that the world could give were added to the beauty of Idalia, Countess Vassalis.

Men passing her in the open air gazed after her, and felt a sudden giddy worship for what they only saw one moment to lose the next; men who held themselves, by age or coldness, steeled to all the glamour of her sex, fell before her; a few low lingering words from her lips, a breath of fragrance from her laces, the disdain of her delicate scorn, the caress of her soft persuasion, the challenge of her haughty indifference, the sorcery of her sovereign smile, these at her will did with men as they would; intoxicated them, blinded them, wooed them, bound them, subdued their will, their honor, and their pride, fettered their senses, broke their peace, gave them heaven, gave them hell, won from them their closest secret, and drew them down into the darkest path. A power wide and fatal—a power that she was said, and justly, to have used with little scruple. Who was she—what was she, this beautiful enchantress?

In one word she was—"Idalia."

Her supper-room, perfumed, mellowly lighted, served without ostentation or display, yet, in truth, as extravagantly as any Court banquet, with summer fruits though it was midwinter, with wines Imperial palaces could not have eclipsed, with hookah-tubes curled through the arms of the lounging chairs, and lazily floating in their great bowls of rose-water, was sought with that eagerness for the entrée which is only found when—for far different attractions—

men seek either the salons of a Princess of the Ton or of an Empress of the Demi-Monde, the legitimate leader of the Aristocracies, or the yet more potent lawgiver, Anonyma. There was a cosmopolite gathering about her table; the Prince of Viana, a Neapolitan; the Count Phaulcon, a Greek; the Gräf von Lilmarc, a Hungarian; the Marquis de Beltran and the Maréchale d'Ivôre, both of Paris; and one Englishman, Victor Vane. Here, at three o'clock in the morning, with the wine just flushing their thoughts with its warmth, and the scented smoke of the narghilis curling out in languid aerial clouds, they supped *à la Régence* with one of the fairest women of her time; and she, lying back, with her Titian-like draperies, floating out like the deep-hued plumage of some tropic bird, toying with her bouquet of rose japonicas, stooping her lips to the purple depths of her Rousillon or the light sparkles of her Moselle, giving her smile to one, her wit to another, letting the wine steal the caution from their speech and the fragrant vapor charm the secrets from their heart, knew that her beauty drew them down into its charm and chain, her creatures and her captives, and let the revelry flash on around her, brilliant as the aiglettes in the discarded dominoes; and, while they supped with her in the dawn of the Paris morning, weighed them each and all—at their worth.

Like the jewels that glistened above her fair forehead, they had no value in her eyes save this—what they were worth.

Yet, if ever there were on any face, there were in hers, a haughty power in the arch of the classic brows, a generous grace in the smile of the proud lips, a fearless dignity in the gaze of the long lustrous eyes: looking on her, he who should have had force to resist her beauty would have still said, "If this star have fallen from heaven, it is great still even in its fall."

The Lost Pleiad of fable may sink downward through the darkness of an eternal night, and become one of the women of earth, earth-stained, earth-debased, but the light of forgotten suns, the glory of forsaken worlds, will be upon her still. It might be so here.

CHAPTER VIII.

"PASSION BORN OF A GLANCE."

WITH his rifle resting against his knee, its butt bedded in the moss, Erceldoune sat alone a few months later on, in the warm Turkish night, on the Bosphorus shores. He had been shooting sea-gulls, jackals, or a stray hill deer, if such came within range, through the last half of the day, while waiting for return dispatches in Constantinople, and was now resting on a boulder of rock under a cypress, in his white burnous and sun-helmet, the Monarch, a fine English chestnut, straying loose at his side, a pile of dead game at his feet, and the starlight full on his face, as his eyes looked seaward thoughtfully.

A year had gone by since he had stood before the altar-piece in Monastica, and he was no nearer to either aim of his twofold quest. Power, patience, vigilance, inquiry—all had failed to bring him on the track of his assassins; masked nobles, reckless adventurers, political secret agents, whichever they were, they had had wit and wisdom to organize their plot so that no trace was left of it and them, and they were beyond all reach of justice, as it seemed, forever. And of the woman, to whom his only clew was the fairness of her face, he had learned nothing. Shadowy, fugitive, lost in mystery, fantastic as a madman's dream, the hold she had gained upon his thoughts was so utterly foreign to them that it was the stronger once admitted there. Speculation was wholly antagonistic to him—his nature was forcible, single, vigorous; that he acted greatly when great occasions arose, was due to the mould in which his character was naturally cast, not to any premeditation or previous contest and sifting of principles; he lived, as all bold men do, meeting accident or emergency as it came, content with the activity of the present, looking very rarely to anything past, never to anything future. To sift moral

problems, to torture himself with theoretical questions, was what would no more have occurred to Erceldoune than to have sat twisting ropes of the Bosphorus sand; hence the poetic unreality of the memory which possessed him was so abhorrent and antagonistic to his whole temperament that it gave a deeper coloring to his life, once received, than it would have done to any other to which it had been less alien. Mental disquietude, moral tumult, were unknown to him; a shadowy pursuit, a speculative meditation, were no more in consonance with his character than it would have been to study the stars for Chaldean knowledge of things obscure. Therefore it was with the stronger force and the more unbelief that Erceldoune felt that a well-nigh mythical mystery had power over him, and touched his heart, and stirred his thoughts, as no living woman had ever done through the varied course of his life.

So sacred had the vision of his ministering angel become to him, so intimately interwoven with holiness, loftiness, purity, with the compassion of the luminous eyes, and the hush of the convent solitudes where her picture hung, that to have seen her at the entrance of the Opera had given him a sharp and unwelcome recall to the fact of how utterly he followed — a phantom; how utterly he knew nothing of the woman who had wound herself into his thoughts.

The face which he had seen in the haze of golden light, in what he had deemed his dying hour, the loveliness that he had found afresh, only afresh to lose it, in the softness of the Sicilian seas, among the heat, the noise, the maskers, the false brilliants, false flowers, false laces, false beauty of the Rigolbochade!—it gave Erceldoune a bitter revulsion. True, there might be nothing in it to do so; she might go thither, not to the lawless whirl of the stage, but simply to the boxes as a spectator of the scene below; he knew this was common enough with the proudest and purest of women. Still, it revolted him; his memory of her, his belief in her, was as of a life as unlike, and as above the world, as the stars that shone now across the sea above the classic shores where old Olympus rose. It was an instinct, an impulse, a folly, never analyzed, only felt; but to think of her, in the gas and throngs of the masked

midnight gathering, had given him much such a shock as an artist, soul-devoted to his art, would feel if he could come suddenly on a Raphael or Correggio Madonna made the sign and center of a riotous casino, or flung by a drunken soldier as worthless loot into the flames of a bivouac fire. This woman, all unknown though she was, had become the single poetic faith, the single haunting weakness of a passionate and earnest temperament, of a changeful and self-sustained life; to have seen her at the Bal de l'Opéra grated jarringly on both.

He thought of it now—and the thought was full of tempestuous pain to him; to find in her a leader of the artificial worlds of fashion; a coquette, worn, brilliant and chill as her own diamonds, with every smile a beautiful lie, with every glance a demand for accustomed homage, would be scarce better than to find in her one of the *cancan* worshipers of the Opera throng, a *débardeur* in rose and silver, laughing through her velvet mask of Venice! Of all places, of all hours, were there none in the width of the world, in the vastness of time, to have found her in at the last than at midnight in the Rue Lépelletier! Who was she? What was she?—this phantom which pursued him? He wondered restlessly, as he did often in lonely moments like these, while he sat looking down the Bosphorus as the lights gleamed in the distance among the cypress and orange groves of the city of the Moslem, and the far-off cry of the Imaum wailed deep and mournful through the silence, chanting the evening prayer of the Faithful.

As he sat thus he did not notice or hear a man approach him on horseback, riding slowly along the sea-shore, unarmed, and lightly chanting a little French air—a handsome, careless, graceful Greek, whose saddle reveries seemed of the lightest and brightest as he swayed a bunch of Turkish lilies idly in his hand. His roan mare's hoofs—she was a Barbary—sank noiselessly in the sands; and Erceldoune did not lift his head; he sat motionless under the cypress, resting on his rifle, with the starlight falling fitfully on the white folds of the Arab cloak and the Rembrandt darkness of his face, as his head was bent down and his eyes gazed seaward. The rider came nearer, the hoofs still noiseless on the loose soil; and the hummed song on

his lips broke louder, till he sang the words clearly and mellowly on the air, in the mischievous truth of Dufresny's chanson:

"Deux époux dit un grand oracle,
Tout d'un coup deviendront heureux,
Quand deux époux, pas un miracle,
Pourront devinir veufs touts deux!"

The voice fell on Erceldoune's ear, rich, harmonious, soft as a woman's contralto—the voice that had given the word to "kill the Border Eagle." He started to his feet, flinging back his burnous; in the silvery silent Eastern night they met once more—and knew each other at a glance: there is no instinct so rapid and so unerring as the instinct of a foe. With an oath that rang over the silent seas, Erceldoune sprang forward, as lions spring, and covered him with his rifle; swift as an unconsidered thought, Phaulcon wheeled and dashed his spurs into his mare's flanks, which sprang off at a headlong gallop a hundred paces in advance by that second's start: in an instant the other caught at the loose rein of his English horse, flung himself into saddle at a leap, and tore down the Bosphorus shore, his rifle leveled, the bridle between his teeth, the Monarch racing at full speed. They were in chase—the pursuer and the pursued.

"Halt!—or you are a dead man."

The challenge rolled through the night out and away to the Bosphorus;—the sole answer of the Greek was to dash the rowels again into his roan's sides, and tear on without other thought than flight, tasting all the long bitterness of death with every time that the beat of the gallop grew closer behind him, with every moment that the shriek of the bullet might whistle down on the wind and the shot pierce his heart from the hand he had once thought picked bare to the bone by the vultures, and buried safe in Moldavian snows.

The blood coursed like fire through Erceldoune's veins, every muscle in him strained like those of a gallant hound in chase; he longed, as the hound longs, to be at the throat of his flying foe: he had a mortal debt to pay, and a deadly wrath to pay it with; the life of his murderer lay at his mercy, and he panted—with brute thirst, perhaps—

to take it, and trample it out on the sands in a just and pitiless vengeance. Yet—he did not fire.

All that was boldest and truest in him refused to let him do as he had been done by;—forbade him to shoot down an unarmed man.

With the hoofs now thundering loud on barren rock, now scattering in clouds the loosened sand, now trampling out the fragrance from acres of wild myrtles and basilica, he rode on in hot close chase, the bridle held in the grip of his teeth, his rifle covering his assassin, while Conrad Phaulcon fled for his life. A single shot, from an aim which never missed, and the coward would be slain as he would have slain, would die the death that he would have dealt; a single ball sent screaming, with its shrill hiss, crash through his spine, and he would drop from the saddle dead as a dog. The Greek knew that as well as the man who held his life in his hands, to take it when he would; and the sweat of his agony gathered in great drops on his brow, the horror of his death-blow seemed to him to quiver already through all his limbs, and as he turned in his saddle once—once only—he saw the stretching head of the Monarch within fifty paces, the face of his pursuer stern and dark as though cast in bronze, and the long lean barrel of steel glistening bright in the moonlight, lifted to deal him the fate he had dealt.

Onward—while the chant of the Muezzin grew fainter and fainter, and the lighted mosques of Stamboul were left distant behind; onward—through the night, lit with a million stars, and all on fire with glittering fire-flies; onward—down the beach of the luminous phosphor-radiant sea, along stretches of yellow sand, under beetling brows of granite, over rocky strips foam-splashed with spray, through fields of sweet wild lavender and roses blowing rich with dew, and tangled withes of tamarind tendrils, and myrtle thickets sloping to the shore, and netted screens of drooping orange boughs, all white with bloom; onward they swept—hunter and hunted—in a race for life and death.

The Greek was always before him; now and again they well-nigh touched, and the foam from his horse's bit was flung on the steaming flanks of the mare he chased; now

and again the dull thud of the hoofs thundered almost side by side as they scattered sand and surf, or trampled out the odorous dews from trodden roses. His enemy's life lay in the hollow of his hand; he saw the womanish beauty of Phaulcon's face, all white and ghastly with a craven terror, turned backward one instant in the light of the moon, and a fierce delight, a just vengeance heated his senses and throbbed in his veins. He panted for his foe's life, as he hunted him on through the hot Asian night, as the lion in chase may pant for the tiger's; all the passions in him, rare to rise, but wild as the wildest tempest when once roused, were at their darkest, and the creed which chained them, and forbade him to fire on a man unarmed, served but to make each fiber strain, each nerve strengthen, with the fiercer thirst to race his injurer down, and—side to side, man to man—hurl him from his saddle and fling him to earth, held under his heel as he would have held the venomous coil of a snake, imprisoned and powerless, till its poisonous breath was trodden out on the sands.

They rode in hard and fearful chase, as men ride only for life and death.

The surf flashed its salt spray in their eyes as they splashed through the sea-pools girth deep in water; startled nest-birds flew with a rush from bud and bough, as they crashed through the wild pomegranates; white-winged gulls rose up with a shrill scream in the light of the moon, as the tramp of horses rang out on the rocks, or scattered the sands in a whirling cloud. There was a savage delight to him in the breathless ride, in the intoxication of the odors trampled out from trodden roses and crushed citrons, in the fierce vivid sense of *living*, as he swept down the lonely shore by the side of the luminous sea, hunting his murderer into his lair;—the wolf in its own steppes, the boar in its own pine-forests, the tiger in the hot Indian night, the lion in the palm plains of Libya; he had hunted them all in their turn, but he had known no chase like that he rode now, when the quarry was not brute, but man.

The snorting nostrils of the Monarch touched the flanks of the straining Barbary, the hot steam of the one

blent with the blood-flaked foam of the other. They raced together almost side by side, dashing down a precipitous ridge of shore, entangled with a riotous growth of aloes and oleander: Erceldoune saw his assassin was making for some known and near lair, as a fox hard pressed heads for covert, and he thundered on in hotter and hotter pursuit, till the steel of the rifle glittered close in Count Conrad's sight as he turned again, his face livid with terror, and the breath of the horse that was hunting him down scorching and noxious against his cheek, like the breath of the bloodhound on the murderer's. There were barely six paces between them, crashing headlong down the sloping ridge, and through the cactus thickets; as he turned backward, with that dastard gesture of pitiful despair, they looked on one another by the white light of the moon, and the womanish fairness of the Greek's face was ghastly with a coward's prayer, and the dark bronze of his pursuer's was set in deadly menace, in fierce lust of blood. Phaulcon knew *why*, with that lean tube flashing in the starlight, he was still spared; he knew, too, that once side by side in fair struggle, he would be hurled from his saddle, and crushed out under a just retribution, till all life was dead, as pitilessly, as righteously as men crush out the snake whose fangs have bit them.

And the pursuit gained on him. Erceldoune rode him down, dashing through the wilderness of vegetation, with the surf of the sea thundering loudly below, and a loathing hate, a riotous joy seething through his veins. The horses ran almost neck by neck now, nothing between them and the billows lashing below but a span's breadth of rock and a frail fence of cactus. One effort more, and he would be beside him; the wild bloodshot eyes of the mare were blinded with the foam flung off the Monarch's curb, and his own arm was stretched to seize his assassin and hurl him out to the waters boiling beneath, or tread him down on the rock under his feet, while he wrung out his confession in the terror of death. He leaned from his saddle; his hand all but grasped his enemy in a hold Phaulcon could no more have shaken off than he could have the grip of an eagle, or the fangs of a lion: he was even with him, and had run him to earth in that wild night

race down the Asian shore. Then—suddenly, with a swerve and a plunge as the spurs tore her reeking flanks—the mare was lifted to a mad leap, a wall of marble gleaming white in the starlight, and rising straight in face of the sea; she cleared it with a bound of agony, and the dull crash that smote the silence as she fell, told the price with which she paid that gallant effort of brute life. His foe was lost!

A fierce oath broke from his lips and rang over the seas. As he put the Monarch at the leap, he reared and refused it; a second was already lost, an eternity in value to him whom he pursued. His face grew dark—all that was worst in him was roused and at its height; he wheeled the hunter and rode him back, then turned again and put him full gallop at the barrier, nursing him for the leap; the marble wall rose before them, clothed with the foliage of fig and tamarisk trees; he lifted the horse in the air, cleared the structure, and came down on the yielding bed of wild geranium that broke the sheer descent.

On the ground lay the Barbary mare, panting and quivering on her side: the saddle was empty.

A darkness like the night came upon Erceldoune's face as he saw that his enemy had escaped him—a darkness closely and terribly like crime on his soul.

Wolf, and boar, and lion, he had chased them all to their lair, and brought them down, now and again, a thousand times over, by the surety of his shot, by the victory of his strength. His secret assassin hunted and run to earth, at his mercy and given up to his will through the whole length of that race down the Bosphorus waters, had outstripped his speed, had baffled his vengeance, and was let loose again on the world with his name unconfessed, with his brute guilt unavenged, lost once more in the solitudes of the night, in the vastness of the Ottoman empire! A second more, and his hand would have been at the throat of this man: he would have hurled under his feet the dainty silken beauty of the coward who was thief and murderer in one, and would have crushed the truth from his throat and the craven life from his limbs under the iron grind of his heel, giving back vengeance as great as his wrongs. A second more, and the traitor who had laughed

with him in good fellowship in the Parisian café, and butchered him in cold blood in the Danubian solitudes, would have answered to him for that work. Now the Barbary mare lay riderless at his feet, and before him, around him, stretching dim in the distance, were thickets of myrtle, labyrinths of cactus, dense groups of oleander, of palm, of pomegranate, where his quarry had headed for a known covert, or had found one by chance, and from which it was as hopeless to draw him again as to unearth a fox once outrun the hounds' scent, or pursue a stag that had once swam the loch.

A curse broke again from Erceldoune's lips, that the distant wail of the Imaum seemed to mock and fling back, as he rode the Monarch headlong down into the wilderness of shrubs and flowers, trampling the boughs asunder, crushing luscious fruit and odorous blossom under the horse's hoofs, searching beneath the shadows and under the tangled aisles of foliage for the dastard who must be refuged there; one dusky glimpse of a crouching form, one flash of the starlight on a hidden face, and he would have fired on him now without a moment's check; his blood was up, his passions were let loose, and the Greek might as well have sought for leniency from the jaws of a panther as for mercy from Erceldoune then, had he ridden him down in his cover and dragged him out in the still Eastern night.

He rode furiously, hither and thither, through the thickest glades and where the shadows were deepest, searching for that to which he had no clew, in chase of a quarry which every turn he missed, every clump of shrubs he passed, every screen of aloes whose spines his horse refused to breast, might hide and shelter from his vengeance. Nothing met his eye or ear but the frightened birds that flew from their sleep among the piles of blossom, and the shrill hiss of the cicada, scared from its bed in the grasses. In the leafy recesses and the winding aisles of those hanging gardens overlooking the Bosphorus, a hundred men might have been secreted, and defied the search of one who was a stranger to the ground, and was cheated at every turn by the fantastic shadows of the moonlight and the palms. His foe had escaped him; before the dawn broke he might have slipped down to the shore and be far

out at sea beyond the Dardanelles; or if the gardens were the known lair for which he had purposely headed in the race along the beach, he would be safe beyond pursuit wherever he made his den.

Erceldoune dropped the bridle on the chestnut's neck, and let him take his own pace; a terrible bitterness of baffled effort, of foiled wrath, was on him—a passion, like a weapon which recoils, hits the one who holds it hard. This man's life had been in his hands, and had escaped him!—and the unexpiated vengeance rolled back on his own heart, fierce, heavy, dark, almost as though it were twin crime with what it had hitherto failed to punish. A night-assassin, only of the viler stamp because of the gentler breed, went through the world unbranded and unpunished, while honest men died by the score of cold and famine in the snows of Caucasus and the streets of cities! Erceldoune's teeth ground together; when they met again, he swore it should be for shorter shrive and deadlier work.

The Monarch, with his head drooped and the steam reeking from his hot flanks, took his own course over the unknown ground, and turning out of the thickets, paced down a long winding aisle of cedars: the night was perfectly still, nothing was heard but the surging of the Bosphorus waters, nothing was stirring save the incessant motion of the fire-flies, that sparkled over all the boughs with starry points of light. Erceldoune had no knowledge where he was, except that the sea was still beside him, and he let his horse take his own way. Suddenly, through the dark masses of the cedars, a light gleamed, which came neither from the fire-flies nor from the moon, but from the Turkish lattice-work of a distant casement.

Was that where his foe had found covert? He raised the Monarch's drooping head with the curb, and urged him at a canter down the cedar-aisle, the noise of the hoofs muffled in the grass, that grew untrimmed, as though the wild luxuriance of the gardens had long been left untouched. Sultan's palace, Queen's serail, sacred Mosque, or Moslem harem, he swore to himself that he would break down its gates, with the menace of England, and have his murderer delivered up to him, though he were surrounded

by an Emir's eunuchs or harbored in the sanctuary of the Odá itself. For anything that he knew, the light might glitter from the dwelling where his enemy and all his gang had made stronghold, or the place might swarm with Mussulmans, who would think there was no holier service to Allah than to smite down the life of a Frank, or the latticed window might be that of a seraglio, into whose anderūn it was death for a man and a Giaour to enter. But these memories never weighed with Erceldoune: he was armed, his blood was up, and, if his foe were sheltered there, he vowed that all the might of Mahmoud, all the yataghans of Islam, should not serve to shield him.

A flight of steps ending the cedar-walk stopped the chestnut's passage; above ran a terrace, and on that terrace looked the few lattice casements allowed to a Turkish dwelling, whose light from within had caught his eyes. He threw himself out of saddle, passed the bridle over a bough, and went on foot up the stairs. Erceldoune's rifle was loaded; he had on him, too, the hunting knife with which he had grallocked the hill deer; and he went straight on—into the den of the assassins, as he believed. Foolhardy he was not; but he had found sinew and coolness serve him too well in many an *avatar*, east and west, not to have learned to trust to them, and he had resolved, moreover, to go through with this thing cost what it might, bring what it would.

He hurried on the terrace, laden with the scarlet blossoms of the trumpet-flower and japonica, and heavy with odors from the nyctanthus and musk-roses trailing over the stone; a door stood open on to it, leading into the large court which forms the customary entrance of a Turkish house; he paused a moment and looked through; there was only a dim light thrown on its walls and floor, and there was no sound but of the falling of the water into the central fountain. He passed the threshold, and entered, the clang of his step resounding on the variegated mosaic of the pavement: its own echo was the only sound which answered—for its stillness the place might have been deserted. But the court opened into a chamber beyond, flooded with warm, mellow light, its dome-like ceiling wreathed with carved pomegranates, while another fount-

ain was flinging its shower upward in the center and the fragrance of aloes wood filled the air from where it burned. like incense, in a brazier; a picture, full of oriental coloring. With his rifle in his hand, his white burnous flung behind him, and his single thought the longing which possessed him to unearth his foe, and have his hand upon his throat, he swept aside the purple draperies that partially shadowed the portico, and passed within the entrance.

A woman rose from her couch in the distance, startled, yet with the look of one who disdains to give its reins to fear —as a sovereign would rise were her solitude desecrated; and he paused, his steps arrested and his passions silenced, as in ancient days he who came to slay in the deadliness of wrath, uncovered his head, and dropped his unsheathed sword, entering the holy shrine at whose altar his foe had taken sanctuary. His enemy was forgotten;—he stood before Idalia.

He saw her in the flood of amber light that fell upon the luster of her hair, on the white folds of her dress with its hem of gold, on the scarlet blossom of the roses clustering about her feet, on the aromatic mist of the aloe wood burning near;—and in an instant he had crossed the marble that severed them, his head uncovered, his hand disarmed, his eyes blinded.

"At last!—at last!"

And he had never known how strong had become the power, how eager had grown his quest, of the memory which had pursued him, until now, when he bowed before her, when his lips were on her hand, when a hot joy that he had never known swept through his life, when in that sudden meeting his gaze looked upward to the face which had mocked him a thousand times, from the blue depths of sea waves, in the tawny stretch of eastern plains, in the stillness of starry nights and the darkness of convent aisles, and now at length was found.

She drew herself with haughty amazed anger from him: —she saw her solitude violated by the abrupt entrance of an armed man when the night was so late that the chant of the Imaum was calling to prayer: she saw a stranger, by his dress an Arab, bend before her in homage that was insult. She wrenched herself away, and signed him back

with a gesture too grand in its grace for fear, and in h eyes a glance which spoke without words.

Then as he raised his head, she saw the features which she had last beheld in what had seemed their death hour, while up to hers gazed the eyes that but for her succor the vulture's beak would have struck, and torn out forever; then she knew him;—and over her proud loveliness came a sudden flush, a softness that changed it as by a miracle; and she looked down upon him with that glance which he had seen and remembered through the dizzy mists of delirium, and had given to the altar-picture at Monastica.

"*You!*"

It was but one word; but by that word he knew that as he had never forgot, so he had not been forgotten.

He bent lower yet, till his lips touched her hand again.

"At last! I thought that we should never meet! And now—I have no words. To strive to pay my debt were hopeless; God grant the day may come when I can show you how I hold it. You saved my life; you shall command it as you will."

His words broke from his heart's depths, and in the rapid breathless tide of emotion, strongly felt and hard to utter; few women would have failed to read in them that, with his bold, keen, dauntless nature, self-reliant, danger-tested though it was, there went a faith that would be loyal to his own utter ruin, once pledged and given, and a tenderness passionate and exhaustless, through which he might be lured on to any belief, dashed down to any destruction. A dangerous knowledge; there are scarce any women to be trusted with it.

Silence fell between them for the moment, where she stood beside the scarlet roses of the fountain, with the heavy aloes perfume rising round, and at her feet, bowed low before her, the man whose life was owed to her by so vast a debt—a stranger and unknown, yet bound to her by the golden bonds of service that had loosed and freed him from his grave. All the glory of her beauty was deepened and softened as she looked on him, startled still, and hardly conscious of his words; and Erceldoune gazed upward to her face, with a dim mist before his sight, as he had never gazed before upon the face of woman:—he had

forgotten all in that luminance of light, that glow of color, that delicious dreamy fragrance.

Remembrance returned to him as she released her hands from his hold, and drew slightly from him. They could not meet as strangers, while betwixt them was the tie of a life restored, and the memory of that hour of awful peril in which she had been his savior. But he had come, armed and alone, by violent entrance into her solitary chamber in the lateness of the night; and on her face was the look of one to whom insult was intolerable and all fear unknown—then he remembered what had brought him thither, and spoke ere she could speak.

"Pardon me for the rude abruptness with which I have broken on you; nothing can excuse it save the truth—I followed, as I thought, one of my Moldavian assassins; I hunted him down the Bosphorus, and lost his track in the gardens here. I fancied——"

"Your assassins?—here?——"

"Doubtless it was an error of mine!" he broke in hastily; that this house could be his murderer's lair was impossible, since it was hers, and he forebore to tell her how closely he had hunted his quarry to her presence, lest he should give her alarm. "I rode him down into a wilderness of palm-trees and cactus, and missed his trail in the darkness—the coward was unarmed, I could not fire on him, and he escaped me. I saw a light gleam through the cedars; and I forced my entrance; then I forgot all—even forgot what my own violence must appear—since it led me to you!"

His voice dropped and softened as he spoke the last word; the pitiless passion which had alone possessed him as he had dashed aside the draperies and forced his way into what he had believed the covert of the man he hunted, were outweighed and forgotten; even while he spoke he had no memory but for her.

She shuddered slightly, and glanced into the dim twilight gloom of the court on to which her chamber opened.

"If you tracked him into these gardens, he may be there, or may have hidden here. Search;—have my people with you—let them take torches, and seek through the

gardens. No one can have entered; but the grounds are a wilderness——"

"More likely he has escaped to the sea-shore; and all I know, or care now, is, that he has served to bring me—*here!* Oh! my God, if you knew how I have sought you!—and now that we have met, what can I say? Nothing that will not leave me deeper your debtor than before."

"Say no more. You owe me nothing. Who would not have done for you the little that I did?"

"You periled your life to save mine, and mine is owed to you if a man's life was ever owed for angel work," broke in Erceldoune, while the force of a new and strange softness trembled through his voice as he stood alone in the stillness of the night with this woman, of whom he knew nothing—nothing, save that she filled his soul and his senses with a sweet fierce joy that had never touched them before, and that he had been rescued from his grave by her hand.

Over her face swept a look almost of pain:

"Call nothing *I* did by that name. And—why should you feel it as a debt, as a merit even? A little cold water held to a stranger's lips! It is not worth a thought."

"It was worth my life, and with my life I will pay it, if you will take the payment, be it made in what guise it may."

They were no empty words of courteous requital; they were an oath to the death, if need be; she was silent, while her glance dwelt on him where he stood, reared now to his full stature, in the amber flood of the lamps, the snowy folds of the burnous flung back, and on his face a grandeur from the stormy passions an instant ago lashed to their height, blent with the eager light with which he looked on her. Then she held her hand out to him, with the beautiful impulse of a proud and gracious nature, touched and bending with a sovereign grace.

"I thank you for your words. There is no question of debt now; they more than pay the little I could do to serve you in your peril. We cannot meet as strangers: let us part as friends."

The words were, even in their gentleness, a sign of dis

missal. He had broken in on her abruptly, and the night was late. He bowed low over her hand—as we bow over that of an Empress.

"Part! True; I come unbidden here; I have no right to linger in your presence; but we cannot part until I know that we shall meet again. I have not found to-night what I have sought so long unceasingly and hopelessly, only to-night once more to lose it."

She drew back slightly, and her face grew paler, while over its brilliance swept a troubled feverish shadow: she answered nothing.

"You can know nothing of me now, but at least you will consent to know more?" he pursued. "A name alone tells little; yet had I had one by which to seek the savior of my life, it would not have been so long before you had heard mine."

In the hot night, in the perfumed stillness, in the sudden revulsion from the violence of vengeance to the wild sweetness of this woman's presence, words far different reeled through his thoughts and rose to his lips; but they were held back by his own sense of their madness, and by the dignity, nameless yet resistless, which surrounded her.

"You would know my name? It is Idalia Vassalis."

She uttered it almost in defiance, yet a defiance which had a profound sadness in it, like the defiance of the slave.

"And why conceal it so long? Can you not think what it was to owe so great a gratitude to you, yet to be left in such strange ignorance of my preserver that, for anything which I could tell, we might never have met on earth?"

"I had reasons for desiring my own name untold," she answered, coldly, as though interrogation were unknown to her. "Besides, I never thought that you would have any remembrance of me."

"To have lost remembrance I must have lost the life you rescued."

The brief words said a volume; she knew they were no offspring of hollow courtesy, but a passionate truth broken up unbidden from a character in which a bold and noble simplicity prevailed over all that the world had taught, in motive, in purpose, in action, and in speech; to understand *her*, might for years bewilder and mislead the man;

to understand *him*, the few moments of that night sufficed to the woman.

"It is few remember as you do," she said, and the soft lingering richness of her voice, with an unspoken melancholy vibrating through it, thrilled through him. "Life is no great gift given back to merit gratitude! But, while we lose time in words, your murderer will escape; if you chased him to these gardens, there is no outlet seaward. Take my people with you; some are Albanians, and will serve well and boldly under need; let the grounds be searched, for my safety if not for your own."

While she spoke she rang a hand-bell; a negress obeyed the summons, an Abyssinian, clothed in scarlet and white.

"Bid Paulus and his sons take arms and torches, and wait without on the terrace," said the mistress to her slave, who gave the salaam silently, and left the chamber. "The men will be faithful to you," she resumed to Erceldoune. "Let them accompany you home; if your assassins be in Turkey, the Bosphorus shores cannot be safe for you alone. No;—you will not refuse me; you can set little store on the life you say I gave you back if you would risk it wantonly so soon."

"My life will be richer and dearer to me from to-night."

The words broke from him on impulse and almost unawares, as he bent before her in farewell: he could not linger after his dismissal; to have disputed it would have been impossible, for there was about her that nameless royalty which is its own defense, and which no man ever insulted with impunity, or insulted twice.

She avoided all notice of his words as she gave him her adieu, speaking, as she had hitherto done, in French.

He bowed over her hand, but he held it still.

"And to-morrow I may have permission to return, and seek to say all for which I have no words to-night? The debt that you disclaim must, at least, be sufficient bond between us for us not to part as strangers?"

Looking upward he saw a certain hesitation upon her face; her eyes were suddenly darkened by a shadow it were hard to describe, and she was silent. Chivalrous in his courtesy to women, pride was too strong in him for him to

sue where he was repulsed, to entreat where he was undesired. He released her, and raised his head.

"It is not for me to force my presence on you. Farewell, then, and take, once for all, my gratitude for a debt that it has pleasured you to embitter."

The words were proud, but they were also pained; they were the terse, unstudied phrases of a man who was wounded, but who could not be lowered, and would not be angered; they served him better, and touched her more keenly, than more servile or more honeyed utterances would have done. She smiled with a certain amusement, yet with a graver and a gentler feeling too.

"Nay—you need not read my silence so. Come here again—if you wish."

Just then the clang of the Albanians' arms announced their readiness on the terrace without; he bowed down once more before her, and left her standing there, with the clusters of the roses at her feet, and the color of the rich chamber stretching away into dim distance around her as she had suddenly broken on his sight when he had dashed back the purple draperies in pursuit of his assassin.

And he went out into the night with one thought alone upon him; he felt blind with the glow of the light, intoxicated with the incense odors, dizzy with all that luster and maze of delicate hues, of golden arabesques, of gleaming marbles, and of scarlet blossoms; but what had blinded his sight and made his thoughts reel, was not these, but was the smile of the woman who had suddenly lit his life to a beauty which he had passed through half the years that are allotted to man, never having known or cared to know.

CHAPTER IX.

RITTER TANNHAUSER.

Of his foe there was no trace.

The Monarch stood undisturbed, with the bridle flung over the cedar bough, and the Barbary mare lay motionless, with her right fore leg twisted under her and broken; of his foe there was no trace; and he rode on silently down the Bosphorus shore back into Pera, with the Albanians running by his horse's side, their torches throwing a ruddy glare over the moonlit sea and silvered sands, and on their own picturesque dresses and handsome classic faces, as they held on to his stirrup-leather.

A few moments before, and he had had no thought save of the blood-thirst with which he had ridden his enemy down the shore, and of the just vengeance of an unpardonable wrong; now he had no memory save one.

With the morning he rose, with but this one thought still—he would see her again! With the early dawn, while the sound of the drums was rolling through the mists, as they heralded the Commander of the Faithful going to prayer, he was plunging into the gray depths of the Bosphorus: sleep beyond his bidding. He knew that for hours yet he could not go to her, but he watched the sun in intolerable impatience for it to travel faster on its way; he walked alone to and fro the silent shore in a dream that was filled with her memory, and dead to all else. He did not pause to analyze what he felt, not even to wonder at it; his life was launched on the tempestuous sea of passion, and he lived in a trance of feverish intoxication, restless pain, and sweet idolatry. What avail how great had been his strength before? It only served to fling him down in more utter captivity now.

Far sooner than ceremony would have allowed him, he rode down the same path by which he had pursued the Greek the night before; but of him he had no more thought

than if he were blotted from his life, when once more he looked upon her;—a woman fitted for a throne.

She did not give him her hand, but she smiled, that smile which gave its light to her eyes yet more than to her lips; and he thought that she must hear the beating of his heart —it had never throbbed so thick and fast when he had given the word for his own death-shot in the Carpathian pass. He had never felt himself stricken strengthless and powerless, blind and dizzy with a thousand new emotions, as he felt now:—so had another bold Border chief, the Night-Rider of the Marches, been conquered when Bothwell stood before his Queen.

His thoughts were full of fever, his life seemed confused yet transfigured. To have thrown himself at her feet and gazed there upward to her in silence and in worship, would have been to follow the impulse in him. She knew it; his eyes spoke all on which his lips were perforce dumb; he did not think how much they betrayed him, he did not dream how much they told—to a woman who had wakened so much love that its faintest sign was known to her—of the tumult in his heart, of the glory in his life, of the madness in his soul, which were so mingled and so nameless to himself.

In that moment, the whole heart of the man, in its brave truthfulness, its bold manhood, its headlong faith, and its awakening passions, was open before her as a book;—she knew her power over a dauntless, loyal life: how would she use it?

She let her glance dwell on him for a moment, those lustrous changeful eyes, whose hue could never be told, calmly meeting the passion of his own: calmly reading and watching the type and the worth of this life, which through her was still among the living.

"Have you found no trace of your assassin?" she asked him carelessly. "They told me there were no signs of him on the shore last night."

"I forgot him! I have only remembered that he brought me here."

"It is not many who would follow so generous a code as yours. You have a deathless memory for gratitude, a forgiving oblivion of injury."

"Hush! do not give me credit that is not mine. As for gratitude—it is not *that* only which has made my life know no memory save the memory of you!"

His voice trembled, the words escaped him involuntarily: he was scarcely conscious what he said. She bowed with that dignity which repulsed without rebuking the meaning of the words.

"You do me far too much honor. The little I did in common human charity merits, as I said before, neither thanks nor memory. You stay in Constantinople, I suppose?" she continued, with that ease which was almost cold—cold, at least, compared to the tumult of impassioned impulses, unconsidered thoughts, and newly-born emotions which were warm and eager in the heart of her listener. It checked him, it stung and chilled him.

"I am waiting for home dispatches," he answered her; "I am a Queen's courier, as you may have heard. You are living here?"

"Only for awhile; some months, a few days, I do not know which it may be. You, who are so splendid an artist, must find constant occupation in the East?"

"I? I am little of an artist, save when my horse or my rifle are out of reach. We, of the old Border, rarely carved our names in any other fashion than by the sword."

She saw how little his thoughts were with his words, as she met again the burning gaze of eyes that told far more than he knew; their language was too familiar to her to move her as it would have moved a woman less used to its utterance; it was a tale so old to her! She sighed, a little impatiently, a little wearily; she was unutterably tired of love. What was intoxication to him was but a thousand-times told story to her. And yet—she saw that this man would suffer, and she foresaw that he would suffer through her. She pitied him, as it was not in her commonly to pity.

"I saw you in Sicily, surely?" he pursued. "For one moment, as you passed in a lateen-boat?"

"I was in Sicily a year ago; I dare say you might have seen me."

"You travel much?"

"Who does not in our days?" she answered, with care-

lessness, but carelessness that veiled a refusal to speak further of herself, which was impenetrable. She had every grace of womanhood, but beneath these she had a haughty and courtly reticence that was impassable. "Travel has one great attraction—it leaves little room for reflection. You like it yourself?"

"Yes, I like it. A courier's suits me better than any life, except a soldier's, would have done. However, it was not with me a matter of preference; I was ruined; I was glad of any post."

He said it frankly, and with the indifference which his decayed fortunes really were to him; but he saw that she was rich, he heard that she was titled, and he would not form her friendship under false colors, knowing that his own title gave him a semblance of wealth and of station he had not.

She smiled slightly; there were both wonder at his honesty, and comprehension of his motives in that smile; the candor and integrity of his nature were very new to her, and moved her to a wonder almost kindred to reverence.

"You are rich, I think," she said, a little wearily. "You have strength, liberty, manhood, independence, honor;—how many have forfeited or never owned those birthrights! You chose very wisely to take a wanderer's freedom rather than the slavery of the world."

Erceldoune shook himself with a restless gesture, as an eagle chained shakes his wings:

"Ich diene nicht Vasallen!"

he muttered in his beard.

She laughed, but her gaze dwelt on him in sympathy with the fiery independence of his nature.

"Never the vassal of a slave? Then never be the slave of a woman!"

He looked at her, and there was something wistful in the look; he wondered if she knew her power over him, and if she made a jest of it; he could not answer her with that badinage, that gay light homage, that subtle flattery, to which she was accustomed; he felt too earnestly, too deeply; a man of few words, save when keenly moved or

much interested, he could not give himself to the utterance of those airy nothings, while all his life was stirred with passion he could not name.

At that moment the great Servian hound entered through the open window from the terrace, and stood looking at him with its wolf-crest up, its fine eyes watchful and menacing, and a low angry growl challenging him as a stranger. It was a magnificent brute, massive in build, lithe in limb, pure bred, and nearly as tall as a young deer.

Erceldoune turned to him and stretched out his hand.

"Ah, there is my gallant friend. I owe him a debt, too."

The animal stood a second looking at him, then went and laid down like a lion couchant at her feet.

She laid her hand on his great head—a hand of exceeding fairness and elegance, with the sapphires and diamonds glittering there, which Mother Veronica had noted, with a recluse's quick appreciation of worldly things.

"You must forgive him if he be discourteous; he has so often been my only champion, that he is apt to be a little rash in his chivalry."

"I honor him for his fidelity. But, your only champion! Where was the chivalry of the world, to leave such a post to a dog?"

"Where! In idle vows and poets' dreams, I imagine; its only home in any time, most likely. The Ritter Tannhäuser swore his knightly homage in the Venusberg, but ere long he turned on her who gave him his delight:

'O Venus schöne Fraue mein,
Ihr seyd eine Teufelinne!'

The German legend is very typical!"

"Tannhäuser was a cur!" said Erceldoune, with an eloquent warmth in his voice rather than in his words. "What matter what she was—what matter whence she came—she was the sovereign of his life; she had given him love, and glory, and delight; she was *his*. It was enough—enough to lose a world for, and to hold it well lost!"

He paused suddenly in the passionate poetic impulse on which he spoke, which had broken up in his heart for the first time, utterly alien as he believed to his nature, to his

temperament, to his will. It was of her and of himself that he thought, not of the old Teutonic Minnesinger's legend of Tannhäuser: and the rich glow of the sunlight, slanting across the mosaic pavement, shone in the dark eagle luster of his eyes, and lent its warmth to the Murillo-like bronze of his cheek.

She was a woman of the world; that noble truthfulness, that gallant faith, that knightly earnestness were new and very strange to her. They touched her.

"If Tannhäuser had loved like *that*—who knows?—even she, the Teufelinne, might have been redeemed. She could not have been faithless to such faith," she said, half musingly, rather following out her thoughts than addressing him; and in her voice there was a vague pathetic pain.

Mad words rose to his lips in reply—words that he had to hold down in silence; the room seemed dizzy round him, the odors of the flowers reeled in his brain as though they were narcotics; he watched, like a man half-blinded, her hand wander among the scarlet blossoms, and toy with the waters of the fountain. It was a delirium; and, for all its feverish pain, he would not have exchanged it to have back the happiest and most tranquil hour of his past. He had dreamed of her, till he had loved her as utterly as ever a man loved a woman; he was in her presence—at last!—and all love that before might be but a dream became at once with giant growth a passion. She did not—with him at least—seek her power; but such power was hers in its widest magnitude of empire; and she was a little weary of it, as sovereigns are weary of their crowns.

"You give fresh air the preference,—will you come into my gardens? They are very wild, but I like them the better for that," she asked him, as she rose with that half-languid grace which bespoke something of oriental blood in her, and moved out on to the terrace.

The gardens were, in truth, untrimmed as the neglect of years could make them, but they had been originally palace grounds, and all the color and luxuriance of unchecked vegetation made them beautiful, with their wilderness of myrtle, cactus, and pomegranate, and their stretches of untrained roses blooming round the splashing waters of the marble and porphyry fountains.

"Little has been done here for years, and yet there is a loveliness in them not to be had in trimmed and trained châteaux gardens," she said, as she turned so that the sun fell full on her face with its delicate haughty luster, its richness and fairness of hue.

"Yes! there *is* a loveliness," he answered her, as his eyes looked down into hers, "greater than I ever believed in before."

She laughed a little; slightly, carelessly.

"What enthusiasm! So great a traveler cannot, surely, find anything so new and striking in a wild Turkish garden?" she said, half amusedly, half languidly, a trifle ironically, purposely misapprehending his words.

The look came into his eyes that had been there before, when she had bade him never to be the slave of a woman; proud, and yet wistful.

"I do not know that!" he said, almost bitterly; "but I know that the gardens may be as fatal as those of Uhland's Linden-tree. You remember how the poem begins?"

The words took an undue effect on her; resentment came on her, haughty inquiry into her eyes, that she turned full on him in some surprise, some anger, and yet more, as it seemed to him, disquiet. Then all these faded, and a profound sadness followed them.

"Yes, I remember," she said, calmly. "Take warning by Wolfdieterich, and do not lie under the linden! Rather, to speak more plainly, and less poetically, never come where you do not see where your footsteps will lead you. You know nothing of me, save my name; leave me without knowing more. It will be best, believe me—far best."

She paused as she spoke, as they moved down the avenue, the roses strewing the grass path, and the Bosphorus waves flashing through the boughs. The singularity of the words struck him less at that moment than the injunction they gave him to leave her. Leave her!—in the very moment when his quest had been recompensed; in the first hour when, at last in her presence, at last in her home, the fugitive glory of his dreams was made real, and he had found the woman who had literally been to him the angel of life.

Beneath the sun-bronze of his face she saw the blood

come and go quickly and painfully; he paused, too, and stood facing her in the cedar aisle, with that gallant and dauntless manhood which lent its kingliness to him by nature.

"Best? For which of us?"

"For you."

"Then I must refuse to obey."

"Why? Refuse because it is for yourself that I have spoken?"

"Yes. If my presence jeopardized you, I must obey, and rid you of it; if I alone be concerned, I refuse obedience, because I would give up all I have ever prized on earth—save honor—to be near what I have sought so long, and sought so vainly."

It was all but a declaration of love, to a woman of whom he knew nothing, save her beauty and her name. She read him as she would have read a book, but she did not show her knowledge.

"You are very rash," she said, softly, without a touch of irony now. "I have said truly, I have said wisely, it will be best for you that our friendship should not continue—should barely commence. If you persist in it, the time will, in every likelihood, come when you will condemn me, and reproach yourself for it. I speak in all sincerity, even though I do not give you my reasons. You consider—very generously—that you owe me a debt; it would be best paid by obeying what I say now, and forgetting me, as if we had never met."

She spoke with the courtly ease of a woman of the world, of a woman used to speak and to be obeyed, to guide and to be followed; but there was a certain inflection of regretful bitterness in her voice, a certain shadow of troubled weariness in her eyes, as if she did not send him from her without some reluctance. They were strange words; but she had known too many of the multiform phases of life to have any feminine fear of singularity or of its imputation, and had passed through unfamiliar paths with a fearless, careless grace wholly and solely her own.

His frank eyes met hers, and there was in them a passionate pain.

"You bid me pay my debt in the only coin I cannot

command. Obey you, I will not. Forget you, I *could* not."

She smiled.

"Twenty-four hours' absence soon supplies any one with oblivion!"

"It is a year since I saw you in the Sicilian boat, yet I have not forgotten. I shall not while I have life."

His voice was very low; he was wounded, but he could not be offended or incensed—by her.

She bent her head with a sweet and gracious gesture of amends and of concession.

"True! Pardon me; I wronged you. Nevertheless, indeed rather because, you remember so well—I still say to you, Go, and let us remain as strangers!"

All that was noblest in her spoke in those words: all that lingered, best and truest, in her, prompted them. She wished, for his peace, that he should leave her, because she knew his heart better far than he himself; she wished—now, at the least—that he whom she had rescued, should be spared from all shadow from her, from all love for her; she wished—now, at least—to save him. From what? From herself.

Yet it was not without pain on her side also, though that pain was concealed, that she spoke.

He looked at her steadily, the earnest, open, loyal, unartificial nature of the man striving in vain to read the motive and the meaning of the woman, and failing, as men mostly do.

His face grew very white under the warm brown left there by Asian and Algerian suns.

"If you command it, I must obey. My presence shall be no forced burden upon you. But you cannot command on me forgetfulness, and I could wish you had been merciful *before*, and left me to die where I lay."

Unconsidered, spoken from his heart, and the more profound in pathos for their brief simplicity, the words moved her deeply, so deeply, that tears, rarest sign of emotion with her, that she had never known for years, rose in her eyes as they dwelt on him; her lips parted, but without speech; she stood silent.

The day was very still; sheltered by the cedars from

the heat, the golden light quivered about them; there was no sound but of the cicada among the pomegranate leaves, and of the waves breaking up against the marble palace stairs; neither ever forgot that single hour when on one word the future hung. His eyes watched her longingly; he did not ask who she was, whence she came, for what reason she thus bade him go from her; he only remembered the glory of her loveliness, and the words in which she had said, "Go, and let us remain henceforth as strangers."

"Answer me, Madame," he said, briefly, "do you, *for yourself*, command me to leave you?"

"For myself? No. I cannot command you—it is only for your sake——"

She paused. What was, in truth, in her thoughts it would have been impossible to put in clear words before him; she could not tell this man that what she feared for him was the love that he would feel for herself; and what she had said sufficed to give back to his heart its restless tumult of vague joys, sufficed to make the present hour in which he lived full of sweet intoxication.

"Then, since not for yourself you command, for myself I refuse to obey; refuse, now and forever—come what will—ever to be to you again as a stranger."

The tremor was still in his voice, but there were in it, too, the thrill of a triumphant gratitude, the reckless resolve of a tropic passion: she knew that the die was cast, that to send him from her now would serve but little to make her memory forgotten by him. She knew well enough that forgetfulness was a treasure for evermore beyond the reach of those who once had loved her.

"Be it so! We will have no more words on the matter," she said, carelessly, as she passed onward with a low, light laugh; her temperament was variable, and she did not care that he should see that new unwonted weakness which had made her eyes grow dim at the chivalry and pathos of his brief words. "The fantasies of Uhland have made us speak as poetically as themselves. My counsels were counsels of wisdom, but since Wolfdieterich will rest under the linden, he must accept the hazard! How calm the Bosphorus is, the waves are hardly curled. There is my boat at the foot of the stairs; it is not too warm yet

for half an hour on the sea if you would like to take the oars."

A moment ago and she had forbade him any knowledge of her, and had sought to dismiss him from her presence; now she spoke to him familiarly and without ceremony, with the charm of those first bright sweet hours of communion when strangers glide into friends; that hour which either, in friendship or in love, is as the bloom to the fruit, as the daybreak to the day, indefinable, magical, and fleeting.

The caïque rocked on the water, half hidden under the hanging boughs of myrtles at the landing-stairs, while the sea lay calm as a sun-girded lake, nothing in sight except a far-off fleet of olive-wood feluccas. And with one stroke of the oars among the fragrant water-weeds, the little curled gilded sea-toy floated softly and slowly down the still gray waters that glistened like a lake of silver in the sun. Erceldoune was in as ecstatic a dream as any opium-eater. She had cast away whatever thoughts had weighed on her when she had bade him leave her; a step once taken, a decision once given, she was not a woman to vacillate in further doubt or in after-regret, she was at once too proud and too nonchalant. She had bidden him, in all sincerity, remain a stranger to her; he had refused to obey, and had chosen to linger in her presence. She let his will take its course, and accepted the present hour. The vessel dropped down the Bosphorus in the sunlight, so smoothly, that a lazy stroke of the oars now and then sufficed to guide it along the shore, where the cypress and myrtle boughs drooped almost to the water, and the heavy odors of jasmine and roses floated to them from the gardens across the sea. Lying back among her cushions, so near him that he could feel the touch of her laces sweep across him as the breeze stirred them, and could see the breath of the wind steal among the chestnut masses of her hair that was drawn back in its own richness from her brow and fastened with gold threads scarce brighter than its own hue, the fascination of Idalia—a danger that men far colder and better on their guard than he, found themselves powerless against—gained its empire on him, as the spell of the Venusberg stole on the will and the senses of the

mailed knight Tannhäuser. With a glittering gayety when she would; with a knowledge of the world, varied, it seemed, almost beyond any woman's scope; with the acquisition of most languages and of their literature, polished and profound to scholarship; with a disdainful, graceful, ironic wit, delicate, but keenly barbed; and with all these a certain shadow of sadness, half scornful, half weary, that it gave to her at times an exquisite gentleness and a deeper interest yet, she would have had a fatal and resistless seduction, without that patrician grace of air and form, and that rarity of personal attractions which made her one of those women whom no man looks on without homage, few men without passion. With the ease which long acquaintance with the world alone gives, she spoke on all topics lightly, brilliantly, the languor or the satire of one moment, changed the next to the poetry or the earnestness which seemed to lie full as much in her nature; and even while she spoke of trifles, she learnt every trait, every touch of his life, his character, his fortunes, and his tastes, though he never observed or dreamt of it—though he never noted in turn that in it all no word escaped her that could have told him who she was, whence she came, what her past had been, or what her present was. The frank, bold, loyal nature of the man loved and trusted, and had nothing to conceal. She, of penetration as keen as she was in tact most subtle, read his life at will, while her own was veiled.

The caïque dropped indolently down the shore, the oars scarcely parting the bright waters, the warmth of the day tempered by a low west wind, blowing gently from the Levantine isles, spice-laden with their odor. With the rise and fall of the boat, with the perfumes of rose gardens borne on the air, with the boundless freedom of cloudless skies, and stretching seas, there were blent the murmur of her voice, the fragrance of her hair, the glance whose beauty had haunted him by night and day, the fascination of a loveliness passing that even of his remembrance. It seemed to him as if they had been together forever, drifting through the glories of an Avillion—as if, until now in all his life, he had never lived. He was like a man in enchantment; the world seemed no longer real to him, but changed into a golden and tumultuous dream.

Time, custom, ceremonies, all grew vague and indifferent; it seemed to him as if he had loved this woman for an eternity. The passion suddenly woke in him would have broken its way into hot unconsidered words, but for that light chain lying on his love and binding it to silence which only gave it more tenacity and more strength. She would not have been what she was to him could he have approached her with familiarity; could he have sought her as his mistress, she would have fallen as his ideal.

No one could have called her cold who looked on the brilliance of her beauty, on the light of her smile; but the languor with which she turned aside homage, and let words of softer meaning glide off her ear unnoted or unaccepted, gave her an impenetrability, a nonchalance, a serenity, that were as impassable as coldness.

"I may return to-morrow?" he asked her, when she at last had made him turn the caïque back, and had tacitly dismissed him.

He spoke briefly, but his voice was very low, and there was entreaty in the tone that pleaded far more than a honeyed phrase would ever have done with her. Her eyes dwelt on him a moment, once more with that profound and undefinable look of *pity*.

"Yes, since you wish. I shall be happy to see you at dinner, if you will do me the honor. Adieu!"

She bowed, and moved to leave him. Something in his look as he answered her made her pause as she swept away, and stirred by a sudden impulse (impulse was rare with her), she waited an instant and held out her hand.

He took it; and bending his head, touched it with his lips as reverently as a devotee would kiss his cross. She laughed a little as she drew it gently away.

"We are not in the days of Castilian courtesies! Farewell until to-morrow!"

And with that graceful negligent movement which gave her so languid a charm, she passed away from him into the villa; and for Erceldoune the sun died out of the heavens, and all its beauty faded off the bright earth about him.

He spent the remaining hours of the day alone—alone till long after nightfall—pushing a boat far out to sea, and letting it float at hazard, in the sunset, in the twilight, in

the phosphor-brilliance of the moon, till the chant of the Muezzin rang over the waves with the dawn. His existence seemed dreamy, unreal, transfigured; he neither heeded how time went nor what he did; but lay leaning over the side of his boat gazing all through the night at the lighted lattices of her windows, where they glittered through the cypress and myrtle woods. He was in the first trance of a passion he had scorned.

CHAPTER X.

THE SOVEREIGN OF THE ROUND TABLE.

All the day Erceldoune spent aimlessly; he took his rifle and went over wild tracts of outlying country, he never asked or knew where, but he scarcely fired a shot; the hours seemed endless till they brought the evening, and he walked on and on through sear deserted valleys, and over hills thick clothed with the somber cypress, with little object except to throw off the fever in him by exhausting exercise and bodily fatigue. The tumultuous happiness and the restless disquiet he felt were alike new to him; he was not a man easily to be the fool of his passions, or to let loose his judgment in their intoxication; he had held them down in almost as stern a curb as any of the iron knights of the Calatrava, and now, in solitude, and in the calmness of morning, he saw his own peril and his own madness as he had not in the enchantment of her presence, or in the impassioned fantasies of the night. He loved her; he did not disguise it from himself; he was not likely to mislead either his own mind or others by the veil of a specious sophistry, and in the freshness and the abandonment of those first hours, there came the chillier memory of the bidding she had given him, to leave her and remain a stranger to her. Fear and doubt were alike alien to him. Yet, in calmer reason, he could not but remember that such words must have their motive in some cause he could not fathom;

that their mere expression had been strange, and argued of mystery, if not of evil. She had spoken nothing of herself; there remained still unexplained, unguessed at, the cause she had had for the concealment of her name at Monastica, or of her presence at all in those barbaric Moldavian wilds. Who was she? What was her history? He could not tell. Not even did he know whether she were wedded or unwedded; whether his love could ever bring him any chance of happiness through it, or whether it were already forbidden and doomed to be its own misery, its own curse. He knew nothing. And alone on the hillside, with the vulture wheeling above-head in the noon skies, and the cypress thickets stretching downward to the precipice beneath his feet, a quick shudder ran through his blood. Had he had the mastery of his life so long only to yield it up now to break in a woman's hands? Had he believed in and followed the ideal of his dreams only to suffer through her, and be divorced from her at the last?

He ground the butt of his rifle down into the loose black soil.

"It is too late now!" he said, unconsciously, aloud. "She saved my life; she shall claim it if she will. Come what may, I will believe in HER."

It was a loyal and gallant oath, pledged to the sunburnt solitudes and the blue cloudless skies. Was she for whose sake it was sworn worthy of it?

The world would have told him no, and, being questioned why, would have answered in three words:

"She is Idalia."

Anything of doubt, of depression, of pain, that had mingled with the tumult of his thoughts through the day, swept far away when the hour came for him to go to her again. One of the Albanian men-servants ushered him through the hall and into the magnificent chamber, which, once the Odà of an Anderūn, served now as the reception-room of the villa; the curtains were drawn back, the blaze of light dazzled his sight, and his eyes, eagerly glancing through the vastness of the space for the Countess Vassalis, met instead the eyes of Victor Vane.

His first sensation was one of intense disappointment, the next of intolerable impatience, the third of reckless

hatred. He did not pause to remember how improbable it had been to think that she would have invited him alone to dine at her table; how unreasonable it was to suppose that a titled woman of so much youth and so much brilliance could live in solitude the life of a recluse; how natural it must be that she was acquainted with a man of fashionable repute and aristocratic habits, who lived chiefly abroad, and knew almost every continental family of note; he remembered none of these things; he only realized his disappointment, he only saw before him the colorless face of the guest he had once entertained, and to whom he had felt that quick contemptuous dislike which a noted rider, an untiring sportsman, a desert-hunter, and a traveler impervious to fatigue, was certain to conceive for a delicate dilettante, an idle flâneur, a rusé silken speculator and courtier, such as Vane appeared to him.

Something in the very attitude of this man, moreover, as he leant against a marble console playing with a scarlet rose, and humming a Spanish Bolero to himself, suggested the familiarity of custom, of intimacy; he looked like one in his own home—not less so from the way in which he advanced to Erceldoune with a cordial, pleasant smile of welcome. His smile was, indeed, always very sweet, and of a rarely winning promise.

"Ah, Sir Fulke—charmed to renew our acquaintance. I was delighted to hear from the Countess that she expected the pleasure of seeing you this evening. I assure you I have never forgotten your most comforting hospitality on the moors; my only regret is that we have not come across each other before."

"You do me much honor, and have a long memory for a mere trifle."

Idalia had announced his acquaintance with her to Victor Vane: they had talked of him then! He could not—would not—have spoken *her* name to friend or stranger.

"The Countess tells me that you think you met about here one of your Moldavian assassins," pursued the other, not noticing, or not seeming to notice, the coldness with which his advances were met. "I am not surprised—so

many rascals come eastward. I hope you will be able to track the fellow?"

"My only regret is, that I did not shoot him down."

The answer was brief and stern. He could have shot down the man before him.

"Ah! great pity you didn't. Chivalry is wasted on these *condottieri;* I have seen too much of the scamps in Italy. That was a strange affair, that, in the Carpathians? Motive was political, I should suppose?"

"Probably. Politics is the hospital for broken scoundrels."

Vane laughed softly and merrily. He was a polished gentleman and a polished diplomatist, and never betrayed it if he were hit.

"True enough! *I* used to busy myself with politics once on a time; but, on my soul, I found myself in such bad company, that I was glad to throw up the cards, and leave the tables. Viola! two of my best friends! Allow me the honor of introducing them to one who, before long, I hope, will let me claim him to make a trio! The Count Laraxa—Baron Falkenstiern—Sir Fulke Erceldoune."

Erceldoune looked at the two men—Hungarian and Thessalian. There was nothing of the adventurer or the *chevalier d'industrie,* however, about either of them; they were of courtly breeding and of genuine rank.

"Idalia is not here?" said Laraxa, after the introduction, to Victor Vane, who gave him the slightest possible silencing glance of warning as he answered:

"She will be in in a moment, I dare say."

Erceldoune crushed his heel into the softness of the carpet with a passionate oath suppressed. What was this man to her that he had title to call her by her familiar name?—what the other that he had a right to receive her guests, and speak of her actions? At that moment Diomed threw open the broad double doors. In the flood of sunshine still pouring in through the western windows there came Idalia.

She swept toward them with the dignity and grace of a woman long accustomed to homage wherever she moved, and familiar with it to weariness. She gave the same reception to all, without a shade of difference that could have

flattered any, except that, when dinner was announced as served, with a slight bend of her head she signed Erceldoune to her, and laid her hand on his arm. She might have felt the quick tremor that ran through his frame at that signal of her preference, at that light touch of her hand: she did see the gladness and gratitude that shone in his eyes as they gazed on her, and a sigh unconsciously escaped her—a sigh not for herself but for him.

They passed into a large vaulted chamber, the walls of white marble, the draperies and couches of scarlet, the matting a silken amber tissue, the ceiling in fresco with wreaths of grapes and pomegranates raised in gold, and at one end a lofty fountain flinging its spray up among flowers.

"Who is that?" muttered Laraxa. "A magnificent man, and she seems to favor him. Is he—*prey?*"

"No. He is a beggared Queen's Messenger. Besides—don't you remember the name?—he was Count Conrad's Border Eagle. Take care what you say before him."

Laraxa lifted his eyebrows:

"Why, in Heaven's name, is he here?"

"Idalia's caprice! You remember, she saved his life; but take care—he may overhear."

"But if Conrad——"

"Conrad is at Athens by now. *Chut!*"

The table was round, so that there was no place of precedence except the right hand of the hostess. The dinner was of as much sumptuousness and elegance as if it had been served in Paris; and the various Albanian, Negro, and Turkish attendants gave the entertainment an Arabian-like effect, heightened by the Eastern character of the confectionery and the Eastern fruits and flowers. The still lingering sunset glow was shut out, and the chamber was illumined with wax-lights in crystal or in candelabra at every point: everything about her spoke of no ordinary wealth, and had the air, moreover, of habitual luxury, even of habitual extravagance. It might be only surface deep; but that surface, at least, was brilliant.

"My table is round, like Arthur's," said Idalia, with a smile as she sank into her chair. "There should be no precedence at a dinner-table: equality, at least, should exist over soups and entrées!"

"Where the Countess Vassalis is, can there fail to be a place of honor?"

She laughed softly:

"You would have me say, like the O'Donoghue, 'Where *I* am, is the head of the table.' That was a truer and haughtier pride than would have lain in a struggle for precedence. The answer always pleased me."

"And yet you are for equality, Madame?" said Victor Vane, with a significance in the tone that did not lie in the words.

A certain contempt came into her eyes and a slight flush on her cheeks.

"My fancies, at least, remain patrician: a woman is never compelled to be consistent," she said, with a negligent indifference.

Yet no physiognomist who had studied the proud curve of her beautiful lips, or the firm mould of her delicate chin, would have said that inconsistency, or any need to take refuge in it, could ever be attributed to the Countess Vassalis, whatever other errors might lie at her score.

"What can that man be to her?" thought Erceldoune, while the dark color flushed over his brow. Vane had not been named as any relative: there was no difference in her manner to him from her conduct to others, yet he had about him a nameless familiarity, graceful and polished like all his actions, which seemed to betoken in him either some sway over her or some accepted tie to her. Could he be her lover?—her husband? The blood grew like ice in Erceldoune's veins as the thought glanced across him. He felt dizzy, blinded, sick at heart, and drank down unconsciously the great goblet glass of champagne beside him that they had filled. The wine that he was used to drink like water felt now like so much fire: the fever was in his life, not in the liquid.

The dinner was as choice and seductive a one as that with which the fair intriguing Queen of Aragon subdued the senses and stole the allegiance of Villeña. There was a shadow of melancholy still on the hostess; but the dazzling glitter of her wit gained rather than lost by that certain disdainful languor—half scorn, half weariness—which was more marked in her that evening than when she

had been with Erceldoune alone in the sunny silence of the Bosphorus. A woman far less conscious of her power than she was conscious of it, would have known that all these men loved her, and were, even if unknown to them, each other's rivals. But the knowledge gave her no more sort of embarrassment than if they had been guests of her own sex. She was well used to all conquest; used to men in all their moods and all their passions; used to intoxicate them with a smile, to subdue them with a glance. She took little wine, touching each variety with her lips; but once or twice she drank a single draught of hot Chartreuse—a fiery liqueur that her sex rarely choose—and with it drove away the shadow that seemed on her, and abandoned herself to the gay glitter of the hour. Watching her, he could have fancied, had not the thought been too fantastic, that she had taken the Chartreuse as men take hot wines—to shake off thought, and give their spirits recklessness. Yet what, he mused, could this woman, with her splendor, her power, her youth, and her fascination, desire that she had not? What could be the canker at the core of that purple and odorous pomegranate flower of her life?

The various courses were served admirably; and he might have been dining at a palace for the lavishness of the banquet. There was great brilliance, too, in the conversation; for in her presence every one strove to shine. There was considerable freedom in the topics and in the wit, though never actually sufficient to become license; but now and then there were flashes of jest at which Erceldoune ground his teeth; they were a profanation to his ideal—a taint on his angel. Unconsciously he had so idealized and etherealized her in his thoughts, that a soil of earth on her would defame if it were too late to dethrone her. "That is not the tone in which men speak before a hostess they reverence," he said in his soul, with fiery bitterness, while he glanced at her to see if she resented it. She lay back with her beautiful languor, laughing softly, slightly. She was either too familiar with it to note it, or if she felt resentment did not display it.

When only the Turkish and Levantine fruits and crys-

talized confections remained on the table in their silver baskets, which dainty statuettes of Odalisque slaves and Greek girls held up in a shower of flowers, hookahs were brought round by a Nubian to each of the guests.

"We have permission to smoke in your presence, then, Madame?" said Erceldoune, as the porcelain narghilé was set beside him.

She looked up in slight surprise, as though the solicitation were new to her.

"Oh, yes! It is as necessary to you after dinner as your cup of coffee. Is it not?"

"It is always welcome—since you have the compassion to allow it," he answered her, as he raised the long amber-tipped tube.

She smiled.

"Of course—why not? That Latakia, I believe, is good? All the rest of it, they tell me, was bought up by the French Legation."

"It is excellent; full fragrance, but very soft. Apropos of the Chancelléries, at which of them shall I have the honor of meeting you most? As yet, you know, I am in ignorance of your nation."

He spoke with the natural carelessness of so natural a question; the Countess Vassalis, as he deemed, must be known by the Representatives of all the great Powers. A shadow of impatience came on her face, a defiant hauteur in her eyes.

"You will meet me at none of the Embassies," she said, briefly and coldly.

And in that moment Erceldoune saw Idalia as he had never seen her before; saw in her a certain grandeur of disdainful defiance, a certain outlawed sovereignty as of one life against the world.

"The Countess Idalia has come to the East for rest," interposed Victor Vane, with his musical, gliding voice. "How is it possible to obtain it if you go *en pénitence* to those tedious travesties of little courts, his Excellency's receptions? Visiting your Ambassador is, I think, one of the severest penalties of foreign residence."

"Our Representative will consent, I dare say, to release you from it if you petition him; or, most likely, he will

not notice your choice *de briller par votre absence,*" said Erceldoune, curtly.

He knew the explanation was a diplomatic lie; he was tortured with bitter impatience to know why the man made himself her apologist, or had claim to explain her actions; his thoughts were in a conflict of conjecture as to the cause of her exclusion from the Embassies—for exclusion he believed it, by the look that for one instant he had seen upon her face.

The access of vivacity and abandon which a considerable amount of wine drunk, and the introduction of tobacco invariably produce, flowed into the conversation; its gayety grew very gay, and though there was still nothing that was licentious, there was a tone in it not customary before women of rank; the anecdotes had a Bréda aroma, the epigrams had a Jockey Club flavor, the equivoques were fitted for a little gilded supper cabinet in the Maison Dorée; such a freedom in any other hour would have added to its piquance and its savor to Erceldoune as to all other men, but it now lashed him into vehement pain and incensement; it brought the breath of the world—and of a very profane world—on the woman of his dreams, it desecrated and almost dimmed the beauty of his ideal. Out of the mists of death he had once wakened to see her face in the haze of the sunlight; the face of an angel, the face of his altar-picture at Monastica: when he sat here in the perfume and luster of the Eastern chamber, with the odors of wines and flowers, and spices and incense, with the glitter of gold and azure, of silver and scarlet, with light laughter and light wit on the air, he seemed to have lost her again—lost her more cruelly. Even while close beside him, the richness of her beauty, the glance of her eyes, the touch of her trailing dress, the gleam of the diamonds on her hair, heightened her loveliness and heightened his passion, till the night seemed full of wild tumult to him, of fierce delight, and of as fiery a pain, there was still on him that deadly nameless sense of some impending loss. She was nothing to him, worse than nothing, if she were not what he believed her. Alas, where was there ever man or woman who reached the spiritualized standard of an idealic love?

The luster and splendor of the chamber, the artistic mingling of color, the rich wines, the dreamy perfumes, the scented narcotics, these were all, he knew, the studied auxiliaries of a woman whose science was to beguile. But he dashed the accursed suspicion from him as quickly as it rose; he had sworn to believe in her, he *would* believe in her.

When she at last rose and left the dinner-table, her guests rose too, and followed her. A timepiece was striking twelve when they entered the salon.

"We have been long enough at dinner to satisfy Brillat-Savarin!" said Idalia, glancing at it. "Do you like cards, Sir Fulke?"

"I think no man could say honestly he did not, though it is the most dangerous of pastimes," he answered her, with a smile. "I have seen its evils in South America, where, as in Pizarro's time, the old proverb still holds good, and they 'game away the sun before it rises.'"

"Many do that over other things than play, and before they know what their sun is worth!" she said, with that profound sadness which now and then checkered her careless brilliance with so dark a shadow. "We will have some baccarat, then. I am fond of play—when it is high enough."

"I should not have thought that."

She looked at him with a smile; she knew his reasons as well as though he had uttered them; there was something of irony, more of melancholy in the smile.

"No? But it is true all the same. Why should it not be? High play is excitement, and it whirls thought away."

"But *you* should have no thoughts that are pain."

"Those are idle words! There are few lives without pain, there are none without reproach."

She turned from him with something of impatience, and as her Albanians wheeled the card-table nearer, sank into her couch, drawing some cards to her. She looked a woman to lean over a balcony in a starlit southern night, and listen to a poet's cancion, or a lover's whisper stealing up through the murmurs of the leaves with the reverent worship of Petrarca; not one to need the feverish excitation of the gamester's reckless hazards. Who was she? what

was she? this mystery whom men called Idalia? he wondered ceaselessly in eager unrest.

The baccarat commenced.

She played with the skill of her country, if that country were Greece, as her name implied; played like one accustomed to control chance by proficiency: but also with that alternate listlessness and eagerness which marks those who seek it as a distraction from those who crave it out of avarice. It was its excitement that was grateful to her, the rapid changes and chances. When she lost, she lost with an absolute indifference, and she staked her gold with a lavish extravagance that seemed to disdain speculation. Once or twice Erceldoune almost thought that she sought to guide the success of the hazard toward himself; if so, she succeeded; he won considerably, to his own displeasure, and she did not. Over and over again, when the current of chance ran for her, she lost it, either listlessly, with that careless scornful weariness peculiar to her, or with a recklessness that made her throw large sums away while she laughed over a bon-mot. Two hours passed rapidly in the whirl of the game, leaving him winner of some heavy sums. Her eyes rested on him a moment, on the dark soldier-like grandeur of his head, which the rich colors and light of the room behind him threw up, as a noble Spanish head by Murillo might be thrown up on an illuminated background of gold and scarlet; then, at a slight pause in the game, she rose, sweeping her laces about her.

"Play on by yourselves, mes amis, as long as you will. I am constant to nothing—the privilege of a woman!—and I shall take a cup of coffee."

They all rose, as of course she knew that they would, and gathered about her, while two Nubians brought round trays of Mocha and bonbons. It had been her caprice that Erceldoune should be a gainer by the baccarat, and she had secured her point without any semblance of effort. The expression used by more than one to her concerning him, had impressed her with the idea that his necessities for money were far greater than they were.

Taking their coffee, they stood about her by the marble basin of the fountain. As the night grew late, as the wine

and the incense and her constant presence added heat to their mutual rivalry, the bands of courtesy began to loosen, the instinctive jealousy that was rife among them began to seethe up in covert words and bitter ironies. Erceldoune resented their presence, they resented his; even the bright soft harmony always characteristic of Victor Vane began to show a gleam of constraint and impatience beneath it. Any watcher might have seen that it needed but very slight provocation, a very little more license, to remove the curb that lay on them, and to let their enmity break into feud, mere strangers though they were to one another. She saw this, but it excited in her no passing agitation even, no thought of difficulty; she was used to see the strongest tempests at riot, and to control them, if she cared to do so, with a glance or a word; often she let them destroy themselves by their own violence. Now, she left them, and ran her hands over the keys of the grand piano which stood near the fountain, and with hardly a chord of prelude sang a rich Romaic ode, a mountain song with the old war-fire of Hellas in it. Her voice was of an exquisite beauty, highly cultivated and eloquent as any Pasta's, and it rang through the silence, throbbing on the air, and echoing far out to the night, where it was answered by the beating of the waves and the music of the nightingales among the roses. Those round her were stilled as by a sudden spell. She sang on, scarcely pausing, grand, mournful, impassioned chants, now Romaic, now Sicilian, now Venetian; songs of the nations, of the poets, of the hours of freedom, of the glories that were gone from Hellas and from Rome; songs of a profound pathos, of an eternal meaning. Neither Mozart nor Beethoven ever gave richer melodies than were those poems brought from the past, from the peoples, from the heart of dying nations, and from the treasures of their perished liberties.

Erceldoune leant against the white shaft of the marble walls, with his head bent; music always had power over him, and it gave her back all the divinity of his dreams, all the power of his lost ideal. Never, since the first moment when she had stooped to him with that one word "You!" had he seen her look as she looked now; those were the eyes that had bent above him with an angel's pity, when he

had lain dying in the sunlight. Anything of her empire that had been hazarded in the past few hours she recovered tenfold; anything of abhorrent doubt that had stolen into his loyalty and faith to her, were swept away and forgotten.

He believed in her—he worshiped her! Not less so, when with a shock of surprise, and all the Border-blood warming in him, he heard her sing the Scottish sonnet, beautiful and living still as the waters of the Esk, by which it was written:

> Sleep, silence, child, sweet father of soft rest,
> Prince, whose approach peace to all mortals brings,
> Indifferent host to shepherds and to kings,
> Sole comforter of minds that are opprest,
> Lo! by thy charming rod all breathing things
> Lie slumbering with forgetfulness possest.

The words, only the sweeter for the lingering softness of the foreign accent, came to his ear like the breath of his mountain air over the heather; as they died off the air he leaned eagerly forward:

"You know our poems? You believe that beauty may come even out of our rugged glens?"

"Surely every one knows Drummond? The gentle Cavalier who died of his Master's death? You must often have seen Hawthornden, I suppose?"

"It was my favorite haunt in my boyhood, though I believe I thought more of the birds I shot in the glen, and the water-fowls of the Esk, than of Drummond himself at that time."

"And yet there was *Patria* in every line of your face when you heard his sonnet just now," she said, with a smile.

"Ah! you know that Pope says,

> 'A Scot would fight for "Christ's Kirk o' the Green."'

To hear any of the old ballads is like hearing a trumpet-call; besides—Drummond's words on *your* lips! I cannot tell you what they were to me."

He paused abruptly, the silence more eloquent than any words could have been.

"You have never heard me speak English," she said, carelessly. 'In truth, if you will pardon me, it is the language I like least. Its low Dutch, with all the exotic

additions that have grown on it, is too hard for my lips; and I have rarely had occasion to use what knowledge I possess of it. Apropos of Scottish poetry, are you descended from the Rhymer?"

"We believe him to have been of the same race; but what is known of him is so enveloped in legend, that it is hard to trace. Thomas himself has grown almost mythical, though 'Syr Tristam' is immortal."

"Yes! because Syr Tristam's folly is repeated by all men, through all ages."

"Folly? It merits a better name; it was, at least, fidelity?"

"Folly! Fidelity! They are synonyms for love. *L'un vaut l'autre.*"

"Would you never, then, believe in passion as enduring as Tristam's?"

"For Ysonde, who is another man's wife? Oh, yes! that is a very common feature. The love is so charming because it is forbidden!"

The evening was very still; the stars shining in myriads above the cypress and ilex woods, the heavy odors of roses and basilica on the air, and through the boughs of the cedars silvery gleams and flashes of the phosphorescent water. She left her seat, as she spoke, and went out on to the terrace, and leaned a moment over the marble wall.

"How cool, how tranquil! And we spend such a night over hot wines, and idle jests, and feverish play!"

To his heart, to his lips, rose words in unison with that sweetness of the night, born from the intoxication of the hour: as though she felt them ere they were uttered, and would have them remain unspoken, she leant slightly toward him.

"Go home by yourself—with none of them, if they invite you. I don't mean," she added, with a laugh, "because they will knock you down to steal your winnings! They are not so low as that—yet!"

The whisper was low and very rapid; surprise was the dominant feeling that it awoke in him, joined with something of a vivid wondering delight—she thought of his welfare!

"Your wish is my law," he answered her. "Do with my life what you will—it is yours."

"No. Not mine. It is a noble trust; never give it rashly."

There was a step beside them.

"A beautiful night, indeed," said Victor Vane. "A picture of Gherardo, and a poem of Hafiz! Certainly we never know what stars are till we come to the East."

"Never," said Idalia, turning to him; "and now you may return to Stamboul by their light. After their poetry come their practical uses. I shall dismiss you all now; I am tired. Good night!"

Lightly as the words were spoken, eagerly as they longed to dispute the dismissal, unscrupulous, at least, as were some of those about her, all were constrained to obey her command—all were powerless to remain in her presence. Erceldoune was the first to accept her dismissal; he would not offer her even so much insult as would have been implied in hesitation, and he took his farewell of her instantly and almost in silence.

Vane followed him with his glance.

"Why have you taken to patronize that Border moss-trooper, madame?" he asked, with a slight satirical laugh. "He is nothing but a courier, and has only an owl's roost at home that foxes burrow in, and cobwebs keep furnished. He is a rough rider and a wild shikari, nothing else; they are odd titles to your preference."

She looked him steadily in the eyes:

"He is a frank and gallant gentleman; that is, perhaps, as strange a one! It may be odd that *I* should care to see an honest man by way of variety; but—since it is my caprice, harm him at your peril."

Her guests were gone.

In solitude she sank down in the depths of a couch, with the light still playing on the diamonds in her hair, and her eyes watching the fall of the showering spray into the basin of the fountain, where scarlet roses swayed into the lily-laden waters. She gave a weary, restless sigh as she thrust back the bright masses of her hair farther from her temples, and, leaning her cheek on her hand, gazed absently into the glancing surface. There was something of release, something of regret, something of self-reproach in her attitude and in her thoughts; though these were

checked by and mingled with a careless ironic triumph, and a royal habit of command and of disdain.

"Have I done more wrong?" she said, half aloud, while her proud head fell. "Greater wrong than ever! He is loyal and lion-hearted—a brave, chivalrous gentleman: he should not come among *us!* The others can play at diamond cut diamond; the others are fairly armed, and have but their weapons turned against them. But he is of different mould: he will suffer—he will suffer terribly!"

CHAPTER XI.

FAIRY-GOLD.

In the full noon heat of the next day—heat that brooded on the hills and glistened on the sea, in which the leaves and the flowers drooped, and the sails of the feluccas hung stirless—Idalia moved slowly and thoughtfully up and down her reception-room, the sunlight straying in checkered rays through the chinks of the shutters, and falling fitfully across her. The wolf-hound followed her step for step; there was not a sound except the falling of the fountains and the buzzing of a little humming-bird tangled among the flowers. There was a certain shadow on her, but it was not that of grief—still less was it that of any tremulous effeminate sorrow; it was haughty, unrestful, with much of doubt, much of rebellion, much of disdain in it—the shadow that was on the Reine Blanche in the fetters of Fotheringay, on Marie Antoinette in the presence of Mirabeau. There was an intense scorn in the dark, soft luster of her eyes—the eyes of a Georgian or a Greek. She was netted closely in, in a net of partially her own past weaving: self-reproach was not the least keen of many regrets that were heavy upon her, and the world was against her; but she was not vanquished nor intimidated.

She came and paused before an open cabinet, on whose writing-stand lay a pile of letters. Her eyes rested on the one that lay uppermost, and read its lines for the second

time with disdain, revulsion, pity, impatience, and loathing all mingled in her glance.

"He always wants money! He would give his soul for money; and yet he throws it away as idly as the winds!" she thought, while her hand absently caressed the great head of the hound. "Well! he can have it. I will always give him that. I would give it him all—down to the very diamonds—if he would leave me free, if he would cut away every link of the past, if he would go and never let me see his face again."

Yet still, though there was much of profound dejection and heart-sickness at her life upon her, there was no fear in it, and no sadness that had not as much disdain. She laid both hands on the dog's broad forehead, and looked down into his eyes.

"Oh, Sulla! when one life is chosen, is there no escape into another? If we accept error in blindness once, is there no laying it down? Plutarch has written, 'When we see the dishonor of a thing, then is it time to renounce it.' But what can we do if we cannot—if it stay with us, and will not forsake us? How can *I* be free from it?"

But bondage was not submission; and she was like the Palmyran or Icenian queens—made a slave, but all a sovereign still.

A humming-bird flew against her, and, frightened, tangled itself among her lace. She put her hand over it and caught it, stroked smooth the little ruffled wings, laid her lips gently on its bright head, and, opening one of the lattices, loosed it and let it fly into the sunny air.

"Liberty! Liberty! It is worth any sacrifice," she said, half aloud, as she watched the bird's flight through the gardens and outward to the sea.

At that moment a Nubian slave threw open the broad double doors of jasper at the end of the chamber, the hangings before it were flung aside, and Erceldoune entered her presence.

She had said it would be best that he should remain absent; yet he was not in error when he thought that the smile she had given him last night was scarcely so sweet as that she gave him now. He seemed half her own by title of that death-hour in which she had felt for the faint beatings of his heart, and had watched beside him in the

loneliness of the Carpathians. She could not forget that this man's strong life would have perished but for her.

He owed her a debt—the debt of faith, at the least. Whatever she might be to others, to him she had been as the angel of life. Moreover, there was in Idalia, overlying the proud earnestness that was in her nature, a certain nonchalance—a certain languid carelessness—that made her look little beyond the present hour, and change her temperament as immediate influences prevailed. The tradition of birth gave her some blood of the Commneni in her veins; and the *insouciance* of an epicurean, with the haughty power of imperial pride, were blent in her as they had been in Manuel. Therefore, since he had chosen to put aside her first warning, she allowed him now to come as he would.

As for him, life was a paradise—a delirium; and he gave himself up to it. The earth had eternal summer for him, and wore an eternal smile. He sat near her in the shaded light and sweet incense of the chamber, while they spoke of things that served to veil the thoughts burning beneath his commonest words; they strolled through the cedar aisles, and through the fields of roses, as the heat of the day faded, and the breeze began to stir among the splendors of the flower-wilderness; they passed the sunset hour on the sea, watching the day die out in glory, and the fire from the west glow over the Marmora waves, and tinge the distant snow-crests of Mount Ida and Olympus.

When the little caïque floated slowly homeward down the waters, the evening star—the star of Astarte—had risen. Through the opened windows of her villa the lights of the banqueting-room glittered, and the table stood ready served, with the Albanians and Nubians waiting about it. She bade him stay, if he would, and he was her only guest. Had her wines been opium-drugged, they could not have brought him dreams more fatally fair—a lulled delight more sure to wake in bitterness—than they gave him now The charms for every sense, the beauty of the chamber, the odors of the flowers, the oriental languor pervading the very air—all that he had felt the night before he felt tenfold now: then a passionate jealousy, a restless doubt, had haunted him; now he was alone, and on him only did her smile glance, did her eyes fall.

There was on her to-night an infinite gentleness, a gracious sweetness, often tinged with sadness, though often bright, brilliant, and illumined with all the grace of talent. But at the same time there was the sovereignty which, in her solitude, guarded her as an empress is guarded in a Court, which made her as secure from words of warmer tinge than what she chose to hear, as she was carelessly disdainful of the precise customs of the world. He felt that she forbade him to approach her with any whisper of love; he knew that to take advantage of his admission to her solitude, to give any utterance to the passion in him, would be to be banished from it then and forever. He felt this though she never spoke, never hinted it; and even while the restriction galled and stung him most, he most revered her for it, he most honored and adored in her the holiness of his ideal.

There was a difference in her from the evening before; while her gayety was less, the darker shadow was also far less upon her. She had scarcely touched the wines, and of play she did not speak; it might be but the "hope which out of its own self creates the thing it longs for," but he could have believed that for the few hours of the present she had resigned herself to happiness—happiness in his presence. The thought seemed wild to him, baseless and vain even to madness; he told himself that it was a presumptuous folly, and he felt that her gentleness to him, her smile upon him, were only such feeling as a woman might well testify, in mere pity's sake, to one whom she had found in deadly peril, and to whom she had restored life on the very brink of the grave. And, indeed, there was a haughty, weary, royal grace always in her, which would have made a man, far vainer than Erceldoune could ever become, long doubt his own power ever to move her heart.

He asked nothing, heeded nothing, doubted nothing. He moved, acted, spoke, almost as mechanically as one in the unconsciousness of fever. It was love of which men have died before now; not of broken hearts, as poets say, but of its intoxication and its reaction, as in a death-draught of opium or digitalis.

She divined well enough all that was unuttered on his lips. She let his love be fostered by all of scene, time,

place, and the spells of her own loveliness that a studied coquette could have devised, yet she repressed any expression of that love as a woman of the world alone can do, without any word that was cold, any glance that was rebuke, yet proudly, distinctly, and beyond resistance.

She followed the impulse, the caprice perhaps, of the moment, without definite purpose or thought at all. For the last eight years men had never approached her save to love; it was a thousand-time told tale to her. If her heart had lost its freshness, or its pity, there could be little marvel in it, even though there were much blame.

The chant of the Imaum rang up from the shore, deep and sonorous, calling on the Faithful to prayer, an hour before midnight. She listened dreamily to the echoes that seemed to linger among the dark foliage.

"I like those national calls to prayer," she said, as she leaned over the parapet, while the fire-flies glittered among the mass of leaves as the diamond sprays glistened in her hair. "The Ave Maria, the Vespers, the Imaum's chant, the salutation of the dawn or of the night, the hymn before sleep, or before the sun;—you have none of those in your chill islands? You have only weary rituals, and stuccoed churches, where the 'Pharisees for a pretense make long prayers!' As if *that* was not the best—the only—temple!"

She glanced upward at the star-studded sky, and on her face was that graver and gentler look which had come there when she sang.

"I have held it so many a time," he answered her, "lying awake at night among the long grass of the Andes, or under the palms of the desert. It was a strange delusion to build shrines to the honor of God while there are still his own—the forests and the mountains. But do not call my country cold; we are not cold; there are bold lives among us; and we can love—too well for our own peace."

His voice had a rich melody in it, and was unsteady over the last words; in his eyes, as they burned in the shadows of the night, she saw a passion as intense as ever glowed under the suns of Asia, the stronger for the rein in which it was still held.

She was silent a moment, then she laughed a little; very softly.

"Do not repudiate coldness; it is the most precious gift

the fates give, if it be not the most poetic. Remember what your namesake of Erceldoune found when the Elf-Queen granted him his prayer; where he thought he held an angel he saw a loathsome shadow. The legend covers a wise warning."

"Ay!—but even while the horror of the shadow and the treachery were on him he had faith in *her;* and his faith was justified; it gave him, in reward, his bright, immortal love."

She turned her head and looked at him, gently, pityingly, almost tenderly.

"Ah! you are too loyal for this world, far too loyal to spend your heart on any woman's love. It is only fairy gold, believe me, which, if you took it, would turn ashes in your hand. And now,—a safe ride homeward to you, and good night."

She held her hand out to him with a sweet and gracious gesture, the more marked in her because she never gave her hand in familiar salutation; he bent over it, and touched it with his lips, a lingering kiss in which all his silenced heart spent itself.

She did not rebuke him; she had not power to speak coldly or chidingly to the man whose life was owed her, whose head had rested in his dying hour on her bosom. As he rode slowly out down the cedar avenue that passed in front of the terrace, he looked up; she was leaning still over the marble parapet, her form distinct against the dark masses of myrtle foliage, the brilliance of the moonlight shining full upon her from the sea. She gave him a farewell sign of her hand as he bowed to his saddle, such as from her palace-prison Queen Ysonde might have given to her lover; and Erceldoune went on through the fragrant night, his horse's feet beating out rich odors from the trailing leaves, dizzy with that riot of hope, joy, belief, and desire, which is too tumultuous and impatient for happiness, but yet *is* happy beyond all that the world holds. She remained long in her solitude upon the terrace, gazing down into the shelving slopes of leaf and blossom, where the fire-flies made the woodland as star-studded as the skies

"It is too late now—he would never forget *now*," she murmured "I tried to save him, and he would not be saved."

Saved from what? Saved from her.

A little while before, and in her own gardens at Naples, a brave boy, in the brightness of his youth, had been run through the heart in a rapier duel for her sake; and she had not felt a tithe so much pain as lay on her now, so much weary, passionate, and vain regret. Then many had called her heartless, and the mother of the dead boy had cursed her with pitiless curses; none would have called her heartless now.

For seven or eight days time came and passed away, spent thus. He sought her in the warm amber noons, stayed with her amid the wilderness of roses, and drifted with her down the sunny sea along the Bosphorus shore, and left her only when the midnight stars rose over the minarets of the city of Constantine. He met no one in her Turkish villa, and she let him come in this familiar unbroken intercourse as though it were welcome to her; as though, indeed, their friendship had been the long-accustomed growth of years. He asked nothing, heeded nothing; he never paused to recall that there was any defiance of custom in the intercourse between them, or to note that she, with her wealth and her splendor, was as utterly alone as though she were a recluse of Mount Athos; he never observed that she kept silence on all that could have explained her presence in Moldavia, or given him account of the position and the character of her life; he never noticed, he never recollected;—he was lost in a day-dream of such magic that it lulled him to oblivion of everything save itself, and all criticism, all reason, all doubt, were as impossible in him as insult and outrage to her. His own nature was one too boldly free, too accustomed to the liberty of both action and thought, too little tolerant of the ceremonials and conventionalities of the world, to be awake to the singularity of her reception of him as others might have been. Moreover, while she allowed him this unrestrained communion with her, he would have been a vainer man far than Erceldoune who could have flattered himself that this was done because her heart was touched; or who should have brought on him his exile forever by warmer entreaties for a softer joy than friendship. While untrammeled by any of the bonds of conventionality, while accustomed to a liberty of thought, of

speech, of act that brooked no dictator, while distinguished by a careless negligence of custom and of opinion that was patrician even while it was bohemian, Idalia still kept the light but inexorable rein upon his passion, which forbade him to pass the bounds that she tacitly prescribed to him. He was a bold and daring man enough; in his early days he had been steeped in vice, though he had learned to loathe it; he was impassioned in his pursuit of her as any lover that the Asian suns had ever nurtured to their own heat. But he loved her as William Craven loved the Winter Queen, as George Douglas the White Queen.

One who should not have cared for her—if such there could have been—would have found an infinite variety, an endless charm in her companionship. She had traveled in most countries, she was familiar with most nations. she had knowledge of the classic and the oriental literatures, deep to a scholar's scope, and warmed with a picturesque hue of an imagination naturally luxuriant, though the world had joined with it an ironic and contemptuous skepticism that gave the keenness of wit, side by side with the color of a poet, to her thoughts and to her words; she understood men pitilessly, human nature unerringly; none could have palmed off on her a false mask or a glossed action; she had seen and known the world in all its intricacies; the variety of her acquirements was scarcely so singular as the variety of her experience, and the swift change of her mood, now grave to melancholy, now careless to caprice, now thoughtful with a profound and philosophic insight into the labyrinths of human life, now gay with the nonchalant and glittering gayety of bohemian levity, gave her much of inconstancy, it is true, but gave her infinitely more of charm and enchantment.

Evening fell once more, closing in the eighth day that their intercourse had thus passed on since the night when he had found her as he had hunted the Greek to her gardens; they had lingered without moving in the banqueting-room, the wines, and flowers, and fruits still standing on the table, no light stronger than the clear vivid moonlight shining on the freshly-cut flowers that strewed the ground, the frescoes of the pomegranates that wreathed the hall, the scarlet hues melting away in the shadow, and

the tall, slender column of the fountain flinging its foam aloft. Idalia leant back among the cushions, the dazzling play of her words ceasing for awhile; the moon's rays touching the proud arch of her brows, the clusters of her hair bound with a narrow gold band of antique workmanship, the voluptuous softness of her lips, and the dark, unfathomable luster of her eyes that met his own, burning with the eloquence he felt forbidden to put into words, but were not moved by them; they did not droop, as women's often do, beneath the fire in his, they passed on from him to rest dreamily on the distance where the domes of Santa Sophia rose against the stars, and the lighted minarets glittered among the cypress groves of the Moslem city.

"It was a fair heritage to lose through a feeble vanity—that beautiful Constantinople!" she said musingly. "The East and the West! What an empire! More than Alexander ever grasped at—what might not have been done with it? Asian faith and Oriental sublimity, with Roman power and Gothic force; if there had been a hand strong enough to weld all these together, what a world there might have been!"

"But to have done that would have been to attain the Impossible?" he answered her. "Oil and flame, old and new, living and dying, tradition and skepticism, iconoclast and idolator, you cannot unite and harmonize these antagonisms?"

She gave a sign of dissent.

"The prophet or the hero unites all antagonisms, because he binds them all to his own genius. The Byzantine empire had none such; the nearest was Julian, but he believed less in himself than in the gods; the nearest after him was Belisarius—the fool of a courtesan!—and he was but a good soldier, he was no teacher, no liberator, no leader for the nations. John Vatices came too late. A man must be his own convert before he can convert others. Zoroaster, Christ, Mohammed, Cromwell, Napoleon, believed intensely in their own missions; hence their influence on the peoples. How can we tell what Byzantium might have become under one mighty hand?—it was torn in pieces among courtesans, and parasites, and Christian fanatics, and Houmousians and Houmoiousians! I have

the blood of the Commneni in me. I think of it with shame when I remember what they might have been."

"You come from the Roman Emperors?"

"The Roman Emperors!" she repeated. "When the name was a travesty, an ignominy, a reproach! When Barbarians thronged the Forum, and the representative of Galilee fishermen claimed power in the Capitol! Yes; I descend—they say—from the Commneni; but I am far prouder that, on the other hand, I come from pure Athenians. I belong to two buried worlds. But the stone throne of the Areopagus was greater than the gold one of Manuel."

"You are the daughter of Emperors? you are worthy an empire."

His were the words of no flattery of the hour, but of a homage as idolatrous as was ever offered in the fair shadows of the Sacred Groves of Antioch to the goddess from whom she took her name. And there was a great pang at his heart as he spoke them; he thought of the only thing on earth he called his own, those crumbling ruins to the far westward, by the Cheviot range, where the scarlet creepers hid the jagged rents in the walls, and owls roosted where princes once had banqueted.

"An empire! *I* thought so once," she answered, with a low, slight laugh. "I had dreams—of the scepter of my ancestors, of the crown of the Violet City, of Utopias here, where east and west meet one another, and nature would give us a paradise if men did not make us a hell. Dreams—dreams—youth is all a dream, and life too, some metaphysicians say. Where shall we wake, I wonder, and how—for the better? It is to be hoped so, if we ever wake at all, which is more than doubtful!"

There was an accent of sadness in the opening words, but the rest were spoken with that irony which, while it was never bitter, was more contemptuous than bitterness in its half languid levity. He looked at her with a vague and troubled pain—there was so much in the complexity of her nature that was veiled from him; seeing her life but dimly, there was so much of splendor, so much of melancholy in it, that exiled him from her, and that oppressed him; the more magnificent her lineage or her fortunes, the farther she was from him.

"You have one empire already," he said, almost abruptly, in the tumult of the suppressed thoughts in him—"a wider one than the Byzantine! You can do what you will with men's lives. I have nothing, I can lose nothing, except the life you gave me back; but if I had all the kingdoms of the earth I would throw them away for——"

The eagerness in his voice dropped suddenly, leaving the words unfinished; he crushed them into silence with a fierce effort. She glanced at him with that graceful negligence with which she silenced all she would not hear.

"No kingdom would be a tithe so peaceful as your manhood and your honor. Never peril *those* for any woman; there is not one worth the loss."

The flash of a giddy, exultant, incredulous rapture ran like lightning through his veins for a moment. She had softly repulsed, but she had not rebuked him; she had known at what his words paused, and the smile she had given him had a light in it that was almost tenderness. He did not ask, he did not think, where his hope began or ended; he did not weigh its meaning, he dared not have drawn it to the light, lest close seen it should have faded; he only felt—

> "So my eyes hold her! What is worth
> The best of heaven, the best of earth?"

"There it lies!" she pursued, dreamily, resting her eyes on the distant minarets and roofs of Constantinople, rising clear and dark in the luster of the moon, undimmed by even a floating cloud. "And all its glories are dead. The Porphyry-chamber and the Tyrian dyes, the Pandects and the Labarum, the thunder of Chrysostom and the violets of child-Protus—they could not make the city live that had dared to dethrone Rome! The hordes of the Forest and the Desert avenged the wrongs of the Scipii and the Julii. It was but just?"

"As the soldiers of Islam avenged the gods of Greece. Aphrodite perished that Arians might rage, and the beautiful mythus was swept away that hell and the devil might be believed in instead! When the Crescent glittered there, it half redressed the wrongs of your Olympus."

"And we reign still!"

She turned, as she spoke, toward the western waters,

where the sea-line of the Ægean lay, while in her eyes came the look of a royal pride and of a deathless love.

"Greece cannot die! No matter what the land be now, Greece—*our* Greece—must live forever. Her language lives; the children of Europe learn it, even if they halt it in imperfect numbers. The greater the scholar the humbler he still bends to learn the words of wisdom from her schools. The poet comes to her for all his fairest myths, his noblest mysteries, his greatest masters. The sculptor looks at the broken fragments of her statues, and throws aside his calliope in despair before those matchless wrecks. From her, soldiers learn how to die, and nations how to conquer and to keep their liberties. No deed of heroism is done but, to crown it, it is named parallel to hers. They write of love, and who forgets the Lesbian? They dream of freedom, and to reach it they remember Salamis. They talk of progress, and while they talk, they sigh for all that they have lost in Academus. They seek truth, and while they seek, wearily long, as little children, to hear the golden speech of Socrates, that slave, and fisherman, and sailor, and stonemason, and date-seller were all once free to hear in her Agora. But for the light that shone from Greece in the breaking of the Renaissance, Europe would have perished in its Gothic darkness. They call her dead!—she can never die while her life, her soul, her genius breathe fire into the new nations, and give their youth all of greatness and of grace that they can claim. Greece dead! She reigns in every poem written, in every art pursued, in every beauty treasured, in every liberty won, in every godlike life and godlike death, in your fresh lands, which, but for her, would be barbarian now."

Where she stood, with her eyes turned westward to the far-off snows of Cithæron and Mount Ida, and the shores which the bronze spear of Pallas Athene once guarded through the night and day, the dark light in her eyes deepened, and the flush of a superb pride was on her brow—it seemed Aspasia who lived again, and who remembered Pericles.

He looked on her, with the glow of passion on his face, made nobler by the poet's thoughts that were awakening in him. He was silent, for his heart was lulled with the

oppression of his love, as the great forests are silenced before the storm.

She had forgotten his presence, standing there in the hush of the midnight, with the Byzantine city to the eastward, and to the west the land that had heard Plato—her thoughts were far away among the shadows of the past, the great past, when the Io Triumphe had been echoed up to the dim majesty of the Acropolis, and the roses had drooped their fragrant heads on the gracious gold of Alcibiades' love-locks.

He knew that he was forgotten, yet his heart did not reproach her; she was far above him in his sight, far as the stars that shone now above Athens; and his love was one that would take neglect and anguish silently, without swerving once from its loyalty. He would have laid his life down to be pressed out in agony, so that it should have given her one passing moment of pleasure, as a rose is thrown under a woman's foot to be crushed as she steps, that dying it may lend a breath of fragrance to the air she breathes.

"You are born with genius, you are made for sovereignty, and I have nothing that is worthy to bring you," he said long after, while his voice sank very low. "Only —only—remember, if ever you need it, one man's life will be yours to be lost for you."

She started slightly where she leaned, with her musing eyes resting on the west; she had forgotten his presence, and his words, though they told her no more than she knew, startled her still with their suddenness. The look of disdainful pain that he had seen before came on her face—the disdain was not for him—but the smile that already to him was the only sun the world held, lingered on her lips a moment.

"A year's pain to a true life—a day's pain, an hour's!—were far more than mine were worth. The daughter of Emperors you called me?—the daughter of men who gamed away their birthright, and played with diadems as idiot children play with olive-stones! Is there much greatness there? Genius!—if I have it, I have sold it, shamed it, polluted it. As for you—I have had so many die for me, I am tired of the shadow of the cypress!"

Strange though the words were, no vanity of power spoke in them, but a fatal truth, a mournful earnestness,

tinged by, deepened to, remorse; the shadow of the cypress seemed to fall across the brilliancy of her face as she uttered them.

"Then,—will you let me live for you?"

The words escaped him before he knew they were uttered, before he realized all they meant, before he was conscious what he offered and pledged to a stranger who, for aught he knew or could tell, might be the head of an illustrious race, the wife of one of the royal chiefs of the Levant or of the East, or—might be anything that Europe held of what was most evil, most fatal, most dangerous in her sex.

She looked at him with a long, earnest, unwavering look.

"It is well for you that I will not take you at your word. No!—your life is a noble, gallant thing; treasure its liberty, and never risk it in a woman's hands."

The calmness with which she put aside words that had been nothing less than a declaration of the love he bore her, the serenity with which her gaze had dwelt on him, were not those of a woman who did or who would give him answering tenderness; yet the tone, the glance with which she had spoken, had not been those of one to whom he was wholly indifferent, or to whom his words had been repugnant. It seemed as though she would never let him come to her as a lover, yet as though she would never let him free himself from the sway of her fascination; she refused his homage with easy and delicate grace, but she refused it so that she showed that the man who had been saved by her in the depths of the Carpathian Pass had her interest and had her pity.

Noting—and for once having compassion for the deadly pain that she had dealt, she smiled on him; she talked to him of a thousand things with her rich and graphic eloquence, that charmed the ear like the flowing of music, and often sank to silence that only lent it rarer charm; she sang the chants of Bach, of Pergolesi, of Mozart; she let him stay with her till night had closed over the distant mosques and courts of Constantinople, and she bade him good night, leaning again over the marble parapet of the terrace, with the moonlight full upon her, as she gave him such a sign of adieu, just so proud, just so gentle, as Mary Stuart might have given to her Warden of the Marches while yet she knew his love and would not yield him hers.

CHAPTER XII.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

Yet—ere many moments passed,—another succeeded him; a head cooler than his felt the charm of the scene and the hour, a pulse slower than his beat time fast, under the challenge of Idalia's eyes.

His rival was alone with her.

Erceldoune set no store on any single quality he possessed; was ignorant indeed of much of his own value; acted greatly not seldom, but never thought so by any hazard; did straightly, instinctively, and without preface or ornament that which seemed to him the need of the hour, the due of his manhood; held his course boldly and carelessly among men, caring nothing for their praise, as little for their censure; had quick, fiery blood in him that took flame rapidly; had, on the other hand, much earnestness, much tenacity, much tenderness, more far than he knew; had kept through his wandering life a heart singularly unworn, a mind singularly without guile; was naturally prone to good faith in men and incapable of base suspicion, and was certain whenever he did love to love to his own destruction, as such natures not seldom do. His rival was his reverse in every quality,—cool, wary, impenetrable under any airy semblance of nonchalance, vain, with the pardonable if overweening vanity of unusual powers, firmly conscious of themselves, inordinately ambitious, but even that in a keen, critical, and studiously systematic manner, the Anglo-Venetian thought Erceldoune nothing more than a fine animal physically, and half a fool mentally, underrating what was dissimilar to himself with an error not uncommon with minds of his stamp, when their disdainful egotistic measurement has not been corrected by the experiences of a long life. Yet, widely diverse though they were, and utterly contrasted in every iota, the one who never resisted his passion, and never thought of her save with such chiv-

alrous trust and absolute self-abandonment as were instinctive to his temperament, was scarcely more a prey to it than the other, who with his love, blended a thousand threads of policy, design, covetous intrigue, and hated it for having stolen on him, hated it for halting on his lips, hated it for leveling him with the herd he had so contemptuously despised; hated it because, for the first time, he had found a talent stronger, a logic surer, a perception keener and subtler, and a courage more daring and careless than his own; because, in fine, he had found his master, and found it in a woman.

This, a knowledge not easily to be pardoned by one like him, made a certain acrid jealousy, a certain smartened bitterness, tinge even the passion into which she had surprised him, when the dark eyes of Idalia glanced over him and read thoughts he had fancied unbetrayed by speech or sign, or when her careless ironies smote him back with the polished, piercing weapons of his own skeptic indifference, his own unyielding philosophies, which were as real in her as they had been till late in him.

For many years this woman had been but a name to him; only a name, through a succession of hazards, that had time after time kept their meeting deferred; but a name that had given her a personality to him, and had been interwoven with many of the more critical essays and enterprises of his career.

Moving through the gore-stained, artillery-trodden maze of Lombardic fields, where in some unrewarded skirmish young, eager, patriotic lives had been shot down by the troops of Austria, gasping to their latest breath "Italia fara da se!" he had stood beside some shattered wreck of brightest manhood that have fallen there, down head-first into the yellowing wheat, and when he had thought all life was dead in that broken mass, above which the tangled corn-stalks nodded and met in summer winds, he had caught a last sigh in which the name of Idalia was blent with the name of Italy, and died together with it down the Lombard breeze. Traveling once through Russian steppes of snow, in the decline of the year, when all nature was perishing, and the great bleak versts of whitened plain stretched out unbroken to Sibe-

rian desolation, he had found a prisoner working in fetters—a haggard, blear-eyed, scarcely human thing, livid with the hue of the lead mines, disfigured with the ravages of frost-bite, idiotic, with a strange dull stupor, that made him utter incessantly, as he toiled in a gang, one word alone; and he had known that in this wretched creature was the wreck of what once had been the finest, the most fiery, the most glittering of all the aristocratic soldiery of Poland; and that the word he muttered ever as he labored was that which had been his ignis fatuus, his idol, his ruin—Idalia. In his own Venice he had once seen a terrible struggle; it was when a mere lad of Venetia, a child of seventeen years, with the clear wild noble eyes of a young eastern colt, had been brought in among others who were "rebels," and given over to the rods that he might tell who his chiefs and his comrades were; the boy was frail of make, and weakened with gunshot wounds, and he reeled and fell thrice under the rain of Austrian blows, but his teeth clinched on his tongue, and bit it through, so that no speech should pass it, and when the strokes told at last more mortally than those who lashed him knew, he smiled as he murmured, though his mouth was full of blood, "Tell her I died silent!"—and he who had heard had sent the farewell message to Idalia, at whose bidding that silence was kept. Once on the brow of a steep hill, looking over the Moravian highlands, with the wide wastes of barren grasslands, mingled with jagged piles of bare rock or stunted larches, with here and there the sharp peaks of a pine-belt to break the outline, and the angry luster of a red evening fading out in the hot autumn skies, he had seen a Monarch, the center of a little knot of Cuirassier officers, draw near, and look hardly and eagerly across to the westward, where, far as the eye could reach, a dark shadow, like a hovering bird above the stony plains, marked the place where the Uhlans rode down on a fugitive's wake; and when reeking and breathless and spent, the troopers dragged their weary horses backward without the prize they had pursued, he had heard the Kaiser mutter in the gloaming of the night, "I would give a province for that one woman!" and that woman had been Idalia. She had been long thus a name on his ear,

and in his schemes, and when at last she had become known to him, he had learned to wonder no more at the name's magic.

To tell her this he had never ventured, really audacious as his temper was: circumstances united them closely in some things, but with all his tact and all his daring, he had never been able to seduce himself into the self-flattery of deeming that she would heed his love-words. She heard so many, the story had no attraction for her; and apart from his own sense of how contemptuously careless she was of how men suffered for her, was the reluctance of chafing pride to acknowledge that he also paid the life-coin of his surrender to one who could tempt like Calypso, and remain cold as Casta Diva, while her spells worked.

Yet he could not restrain one mark of the passion—jealousy—as he sat that night beside her in the dining-hall of the Turkish villa, and stretched himself from his pile of cushions to lift from the carpet a white riding glove that caught his eye where it lay.

"A stray waif of our beggared laird's, is it not, madam? He has been here to-day."

"If you mean Sir Fulke Erceldoune, he only left an hour or so ago. I wonder you did not meet him."

"No; I saw nothing of him. The Moldavian bullet did him good service, since it has won him so much of your interest. He should be vastly indebted to it!"

She laughed a little.

"Surely, a shot in the lungs is not so very pleasant a matter that a man need be grateful for it!"

"Are there not many who risked shots far more mortal than his in the mere hope to win what they never did, but he does—your pity?"

She shrugged her shoulders ever so slightly.

"Why should you imagine I pity him? Have you not seen him *here?*"

The emphasis spoke more than volumes could have done. Her companion bowed his head.

"True! The real mercy would have been—exclusion! Yet pity him you do, miladi, since you bade me 'harm him at my peril!'"

She looked at him such a curiously fixed regard, that had a hundred meanings in it.

"Let us make an end of this fencing," she said, quietly. "There are none here to dupe. We can speak frankly. We have done this man quite evil enough without bringing more upon him."

"We! I fail to apprehend you——"

She gave a little gesture of impatience.

"Monsieur, you have not known me very long, or you would know me too well to attempt those tactics. Evasion answers nothing with me, and why should we attempt it? Our cause is the same, and we both are equally aware that this brave-hearted gentleman was the prey of its viler adherents."

"But——"

"Pardon me; I have said we both know it. I have grace enough to blush for it: and you——?"

For the moment a faint flush of shame kindled over his face; he was for the moment silenced, embarrassed, uncertain how to reply; he had never dreamed that his share in the Carpathian attack—which his intelligence had directed unseen, though his hand was not active nor his complicity divulged in it—had been suspected by her, and he was now almost, for the first time in his life, astray in the twilight of bewildered doubts of intricate apprehensions.

She laughed slightly again.

"Ah! I told you you did not know me; you thought you had deceived me! Well, never seek that again. A man once did: a man of Leghorn; he was clever and vain; he said to himself, '*Altro*, a woman! and they obey her? I, for one, I will not; I will blind her.' And he thought he was strong enough. He stole away, like the fox that he was, and carried his scheme with him—his scheme to treat with Austria unknown to us; unknown, he thought, to the very walls of the room he slumbered in: to the very river reeds he walked by, he thought himself so strong. But I learnt it."

"And then?"

"Then! Why then I taught him what such an error cost."

"And that cost was?"

She smiled a little: and in her eyes gathered a certain darkling, retrospective, scornful memory. "What he merited. It had been better for him that he had never been born."

A chill, of something that was almost fear, passed over his listener's cold, keen, courageous nature; he, too, held that which was concealed from her,—if she avenged treachery thus?

"Vengeance, madame?" he said, scarcely caring what triviality of speech served to screen his thoughts. "Surely nothing so barbarous lingers amid so much worldly wisdom, nothing so ferocious harbors amid so much divine witchery?"

"Revengeful! No. I do not think I am that; though one knows ill one's own errors. It is easy to forgive; we scorn where we pardon, but we pardon *because* we scorn."

She spoke musingly, with a grave and weary meditation, as though memory, and not his words, usurped her: then, suddenly, she shook away any darker remembrance that dwelt with her, and turned full on him brilliant, penetrating eyes of half-contemptuous questioning.

"Some of you it was who wrought that glorious piece of honest work in the Carpathians. You see, they were afraid that I should know their scheme: they stole out to do it in darkness; they thought that I should never learn it. But it all came to me; simply enough. I found their victim and saved him; and when Marc Lassla dragged himself half dying to my lodge in the mountains, and gasped us out a lame history of a bear-play, telling us that young Vlistchnow lay dead in the woods from the brute's embrace, the whole was clear enough to me. The dying man's and the dead one's injuries were both no bear's wounds, but the fruit of pistol bullets; and though Lassla breathed his last in an hour or so, saying no more, I knew well enough that they had both been shot down by the Scot, and that the planned attack had been done by my people;—by mine!"

There was a deadly bitterness in the last words, an ominous meaning: such as might have run through Catherine of Russia's speech when she found a vassal faithless.

"Your people!" His surprise was admirably feigned, but it did not deceive her.

"Never trouble yourself to assume ignorance!" she said, with a certain amusement at his discomfiture. "You knew very well of the plan——"

"On my honor——"

"Have we any of that quality among us to swear by?"

"Nay! as a gentleman, as a man, I declare to you I know nothing of it."

She bowed her head; courteously, as one too highly-bred to accuse him; carelessly, as one too worldly-wise to believe him.

"Nothing!" he averred, irritably mortified by that unspoken incredulity. "You may believe me, madame; from my policies, if not my virtues, I am totally opposed to every sort of violence; deem it ill-advised, uncivilized, barbaric: invariably give my veto against it. Force is the weapon of savages; learning has done little for us if we cannot find a better, a surer, a more secret tool. To prevent the wild spirits that join us from following their brute instincts, and blundering headlong into unwise action, would be impossible. You can do more than most; but I doubt very much if you have not oftentimes roused tigers whom even you could not tame when once they had tasted of slaughter. The evil of every national movement is that the majority, once allowed to move at all, refuse to proceed by intellectual means, and loose themselves at once to physical violence, in which every good thing is lost, every temperate voice drowned. It is this sort of fatal misconception from which such criminal essays as that which attacked Sir Fulke Erceldoune proceed: it is impossible to avoid their appearing alike expedient and pardonable to a certain class of characters."

The explanation was given with graceful ease, with eloquent address: she heard it with courtesy, also with incredulity.

"Yes; and that 'class' serve as excellent weapons for brilliant intelligences which need to use them; excellent scapegoats for such intelligences when they do not care to appear in the intrigues they suggest."

He felt the thrust, yet he parried it with seeming tranquillity.

"That is but too true, indeed, and the unscrupulousness is not, alas! on the side of the mere *mauvais sujets.* Apropos, madame, you know all things; who then was the leader of the Carpathian episode?"

A stern impatience passed for an instant over the splendor of her face, mingled with something of more wounded pain.

"You must know too well whom I supposed to be so."

The answer was very low; there was a thrill of passionate shame in it.

"Ah!" There was a whole world of gentle sympathy, of profound comprehension in the deep breath he drew. "Was he not then implicated?"

She lifted her head and looked at him long and steadily: there was more than contemplation in the look. "You can better tell that than I."

"No. Indeed you wrong me, madame. May I hear what you think yourself now we are on the subject?"

A scorn that she repressed in utterance flashed with a weary darkness in her eyes.

"I would have sworn—*Yes.* He has sworn to me by the only name I ever knew him to hold sacred, *No.*"

"Why doubt him then?"

"*Why?* Ask me rather why even on his oath believe him!"

The impetuous disdain that burned through this retort had a terrible scathing satire in it. He looked at her with an admiration that was the more vivid because he thought her intentionally deceiving him, and thought also the deception so magnificently wrought out.

"Ah, ma belle Comtesse," he murmured, in his liquid flowing French, that both habitually used. "That you should have to feel this; that you should have to give such passion of contempt to one so near to you! It is 'Athene to a Satyr.' How is it that, with such an inspiration as you beside him, Conrad has never——"

She interrupted him; with the ironical cold nonchalance of her common tone resumed.

"Count Phaulcon is at least *your* friend, monsieur; let that suffice to dismiss his name. I suspected him; I do still suspect him. Did I think that he had been on the

Turkish shore last night, I should have certainty in him of suspicion; but in saying this to you I say no more than I have done, or shall do, to him himself."

"And to —— Monsieur Erceldoune?"

"No." The answer was rapid and peremptory. She turned her head to him with something of the goaded impatience of a stag at bay mingling with her careless dignity. "How can you ask? You have heard him say he will kill his assassin if they ever meet. And he would be justified."

"And his 'justification' would free you not a little. Ah, where is there any sophism that will curve round to its own point so deftly as a woman's!" thought her companion, while he bent forward with a gentle deference in his air, a hesitating sympathy in his tone:

"Count Phaulcon is my very good friend, it is true, madame; and yet I scarcely think I deserved to be reminded of that by a rebuke, because I cannot choose but regret that——"

"Regret nothing at my score, monsieur."

"What! not even that which you yourself regret?"

'When I tell you that there is such a thing, not before."

'You are very cruel——"

'Am I? Well, I have no great liking for sympathy, and not much need for it. If one cannot stand alone, one deserves, I fancy, to fall. Poets have made an idol and a martyr of the sensitive plant; their use of it is an unwise allegory: to shrink at every touch, to droop at every stroke, to be at the mercy of every hand, strange or familiar—an odd virtue that! It would not commend itself to me."

"True. Is sensitiveness much after all except vanity quick to be wounded, as the sea-dianthus that dies of a finger thrust at it? Believe me, I meant not to offer the insult of pity, scarcely dared to intend the familiarity of sympathy; I merely felt—forgive me if I say it—I have long known Conrad, I have but of late known you; can you not guess that the old and the recent friendship alike tell me that you, despite all your pride, indeed *because* of all your pride, are bitterly galled, are shamefully companioned by a life unworthy you?"

He paused; he had doubted in how far he might venture even thus much, for she was of a nature to which compassion is unendurable, a thing to be shunned far more than pain itself. He knew that already, had he never known he would have seen it in the barely perceptible quiver with which she drew away as a high-hearted and fearless hound will take its mortal wound, and refuse a sign of suffering.

"You say a fact too plain for me to give it denial," she said, chilly; "but it is also one that I must decline to discuss with you. Let us talk of other matters."

Even her companion's long-trained audacity was not bold enough to force her on a theme she thus refused.

"Forgive me," he murmured hurriedly, "it is hard sometimes not to speak out one's thoughts."

"I thought the hardship rather lay in being sometimes compelled to do so."

"You *will* jest !——"

"Well, jests are better than tragedies. Life is always jostling the two together."

"We are like enough to have one tragedy, madame, if that hotheaded courier's suspicions point the same way as yours do,"—he spoke irritably, inconsequently; for he was both checked and incensed.

"It is not likely they will ever do so."

"Why? Suppose—merely suppose your fear aright, and that Phaulcon and your new friend ever meet under your roof; what then?"

She did not reply for a moment, while a shadow of many memories, tinged with something of a smile, passed over her features.

"What then? Why then I should know the truth of this matter, which *Monsieur mon ami* here refuses to tell me."

He felt the sting; and he knew that he had better provoke no more encounters with a woman's wit. And being piqued he wronged her, as pique commonly wrongs those who have provoked it; and thought that she knew far more of this thing than even he himself.

CHAPTER XIII.

"DIE QUALST MICH ALS TYRANN; UND ICH? ICH LIEB DICH NOCH!"

WHEN he had left her, she leaned awhile over the terrace parapet, with her eyes musingly dropped on the shelving mass of myrtle-blossom, and as she stood there in her solitude, a step hurriedly crushed the fallen leaves of pomegranate flowers; before she saw him, a man had thrown himself before her, pressing his lips on the trailing folds of her laces, kneeling there as one kneels who sues for life.

"Idalia!"

She started and looked down; and drawing herself from his clasp with the gesture of her habitual haughty grace, turned from him without a word, bending her head with a silent salutation.

"Idalia!—I have come only to look upon your face."

The vibration of intense suffering in his voice made her involuntarily pause; but when she spoke it was with a calm indifference, a pointed meaning.

"I do not receive this evening, monsieur; did not my people inform you so?"

A quick shudder shook him; he it was who had worn the badge of the Silver Ivy, and had answered Victor Vane with three brief pregnant words—"To my cost!" To his cost, his most bitter cost, he had loved her, and he had forced his way to her here in the quiet of the night. He grasped again the hem of her dress, and held her there, looking upward to that fair and fatal face in the radiance of the full moon shining from the sea.

She had destroyed him:—but he could not look on her without growing drunk with his own idolatry as men grow drunk with wine.

"Idalia! have you no pity—no remorse? You know

what you have made me, and you give me no mercy? Is your heart stone?"

No change came on her face; she smiled with a negligent disdain.

"You have studied at the Porte St. Martin! That is not the way we speak anywhere else in Paris."

There was a contemptuous languor in the words more cruel than the bitterest utterance, in earnest, would have been; with scenes and hours so vivid in his memory, in which his love had been lavished at her feet, and sunned in her smile, and welcomed by her word, they struck on him as passing all that history had ever held of woman's traitorous heartlessness.

Idalia was now—what much evil done to her had made her.

His hands clinched on her dress in a convulsive wretchedness.

"Have you no heart, no soul, no conscience? I laid down all I had on earth for you; I gave you my peace, my honor, my abject slavery. And yet——"

His voice died inarticulate, while the light from the sea fell on his upturned face—a face of fair and gallant cast, of ancient race, and leonine blood, in the early prime of manhood, yet now worn, haggard, drawn, and darkened with the hopeless passions that were loosening in him beyond all strength to hold them.

She looked down on him, still without change of glance or feature. It was a tale so often told to her. She drew herself from him with her coldest indolence.

"You came here to tell me this? It was scarcely worth while. Good evening."

Like a deer stung by a shot, he started to his feet, standing between her and the shafts of jasper that formed the portico into the building; the endurance that had laid him at her mercy, suffering all things for her sake, living only in the light of her smile, and knowing no law but her desire, broke its bondage now and turned against her in fierce but just rebuke, incoherent in its misery.

"It is true, then, what they say! You have a heart of bronze, a soul of marble? You have that glory of your loveliness only to draw men in your net and hurl them to

perdition? It is true, then, in worshiping you we worship the fairest traitress, the most angelical lie that the world ever saw? Have you ever thought what it is you do? Have you ever asked yourself what price *we* pay for the power you hold? Have you ever thought that you may tempt us, and betray us, and destroy us once too often, till your very slaves may turn against you?"

He stood alone with her in the lateness of the night, his words incoherent and crushed between his teeth; and she knew that she had done him wrong which before now has turned men into fiends, and has made them stamp out into its grave the beauty that has beguiled them and betrayed them. But she gave no sign of fear; her dauntless nature knew fear no more than any Spartan knew it. Her conscience alone smote her, a pang of remorse wakened in her. She was silent, looking at him in the shadowy moonlight; she knew that she had ruined his life—a high-souled, patriotic life, full of bright promise and of fearless action—a life laid subject to her, and broken in her hands as the child breaks the painted butterfly.

"God!" he cried, and it was the involuntary cry of a great despair that broke his force down before the woman by whom he had been fooled and forsaken, yet whom he still worshiped but the more the more that he condemned her. "That such beauty should only veil a heart of steel! If you had ever loved—if ever you could love—you could not do such treachery to love as this. I know you as you are, now—now that it is too late, and yet—and yet——"

A single sob choked his voice, he threw himself again at her feet in the sheer blindness of an utter misery, his hands clutching the folds of her dress, his lips pressed in kisses on the senseless laces, conscious alone of the woman who now had no more thought, or need, or tenderness for him than the cold marble that rose above him into the starry stillness of the Bosphorus night.

"And yet there is no crime I would not take on me at your word—there is no sin I would not sin for you! I know you as you are—and yet, so utterly in spite of all, I love you! I came to-night to see your face once more I go to die for Italy. Say one last gentle word to me; we shall never meet again on earth."

She stood there, above him, in the clear radiance shining from the waters; his words had struck deep to the core of the remorse that was slowly awaking in her; a profound pity for him, as profound a loathing of herself, arose; all the gentler, purer, nobler nature in her was touched, and accused her more poignantly than the most bitter of his accusations. She stooped slightly; her proud instincts, her habit of power, and her world of levity and mockery, made her yield with difficulty, made her pity with rarity; but when she did either, she did them as no other woman could.

She stooped slightly, and her eyes were heavy as they rested on him:

"I have but one word: Forgive me!"

And *in* that one word Idalia spoke more than could have been uttered in the richest eloquence that could have confessed her error and his wrong. Yet while she said it, she knew that both the sin and the injury were beyond all pardon.

He looked up, hope against hope flashing in on him one moment: it was quenched as soon as born; her face had pain on it, but the light that he had once seen there was gone—there was no tenderness for him.

His head sank again:

"Forgive! I would have forgiven you death—I forgive you more than death. But if you ever meet again one who loves you as I have loved, remember me—and spare him."

The generous answer died in his throat; never again, he knew, would he look upon the loveliness that had betrayed him; he knew that he was going to his death, as surely as though he sank into the sea-depths glistening below, and that when he should lie in the darkness and decay of a forgotten soldier's grave, there would be no pang of memory for him in her heart, no thought that gave him pity or lament in the life to which his own was sacrificed.

He looked yet once again upward to her face, as dying men may look their last on what they treasure; then slowly, very slowly, as though each moment were a separate pang, he loosened his hold upon her, and turned and

went through the shadows of the cypress, downward to where the waves were drearily breaking on the strand below.

Where he had left her, she stood silent, the moonlight falling on the white marble about her, till from the sea the luster on her looked bright as day. In one thing alone had he wronged her. She knew the weariness of remorse, she knew the tenderness of pity.

Though no sign had escaped her, each word of his accusation had quivered to her heart; he did not feel its truth more bitterly than she. That upbraiding, poured out in the solitude of the night, had stirred her heart with its condemnation; it showed her what it was that she had done; it made her shudder from the fatal gift of her own dominion; how had she used it?

Again and again, till they had passed by her, no more noted than the winds that swept the air about her, the anguish of men's lives, the fire of their passions had been spent upon her, and been wasted for her; she had won love without scruple, embittered it without self-reproach. But now, her own heart for once was stirred.

"What do I do?" she asked herself. "Ruin their lives, destroy their peace, send them out to their deaths—and for what? A phantom, a falsehood, an unreality, that betrays them as utterly as I! The life I lead is but cruelty on cruelty, sin on sin. I know its crime, and yet I love its sovereignty still. I am vile enough to feel the charm of its power, while I have conscience enough to abhor its work."

The thoughts floated through her mind where she stood, looking over to where the sea lay, the dark outline of some felucca alone gliding spirit-like across the moonlit surface.

The last words of the man who had left her seemed to echo still upon the air; the summons of conscience, the reproach of the past, the duty and the demand of the present, all were spoken in them. Even as he had uttered them, she had thought of one whose fate would be the same with this which now upbraided her, and pleaded with her. She knew that he should be spared. It might not be too late to save him—to save him from herself.

He who had left her to go out and find a soldier's death on the blood-soaked plains of Lombardy, stood between her and the other life which she had once saved from such a grave, and which now was in the first flush of faith that held her rather angel than woman, and of love that had sprung up, full grown in one short night, like a flower under tropical suns.

Better one pang for him at first than for a while the sweetness of a cheated hope, to end in lifelong desolation, like that which had to-night risen before her, and arraigned her for its ruin.

"Most men in their passion love but their own indulgence; but now and then there are those who love us for ourselves; they should be spared," she thought, still standing, her face turned once more toward the sea.

They called her unscrupulous, she had been so; they called her heartless, merciless, remorseless, in all her poetic beauty, there had been too much truth in the charge; much error lay on her life, great ruin at her door; but of what this woman really was her foes knew nothing, and her lovers knew as little. With neither was she ever what she now was, looking on the white gleam of the surf where it broke up on the sands below—now, when she was musing how to save again, from herself, him whom she had once saved from the grave.

In the break of the morning Idalia rose; and thrusting back the green lattice of her casement glanced outward at the east. The loose silken folds of a Turkish robe floated round her, her face was pale with a dark shadow beneath the eyes, and her hair lay in long loose masses on her shoulders, now and then lifted by the wind. She was thinking deeply and painfully, while her eyes followed mechanically the flight of white-winged gulls, as they swept in a bright cloud above the water. The reproaches that had been uttered to her a few hours before still had their sting for her, the truths with which they had been barbed still pierced her.

Proud, fearless, negligent, superbly indifferent to the world's opinion, contemptuous of its censure as she was careless of its homage, she still was not steeled against the accusation of her own heart and conscience. She was no

sophist, no coward; she could look at her own acts and condemn them with an unsparing truth; though haughtily disdainful of all censure, she tore down the mask from her own errors, and looked at them fully, face to face, as they were. Erred she had, gravely, passing on from the slighter to the deeper, in that course which is almost inevitable, since no single false step ever yet could be taken *alone*.

The brightest chivalry, the noblest impulses, the most unquestioning self-sacrifice, the most headlong devotion, these had all been wakened by her, and lavished on her;—what had she done with them? Accepted them, to turn them to her tools; excited them, to make them her slaves and her creatures; won them and wooed them with sorceress charm, to weigh them with cold cruelty at their worth, and let them drift unpitied to their doom.

Those who had loved her had been no more to her than this; beguiled for the value they were, betrayed to passion that by it they might grow plastic to her purpose, bent to her command. She, who had all the superb, satiric, contemptuous disbelief in suffering of a woman of the world, still knew that, over and over again, the tide of grief had broken up vainly against the disdain of her delicate, pitiless irony; knew that over and over again a life made desolate, a life driven out to recklessness and desperation, a life laid down in the early glory of ambitious manhood, had been sacrificed through her, ruined by her, as cruelly, as carelessly as a young child destroys the brightness of the butterfly, the fragrance of the cowslip, in its sport of summer-day chase or spring-day blossom-ball. And for what? For the sake of triumphs that had palled in their gaining, for the sake of gains that were valueless now, for the sake of a sovereignty that seemed to brand her forehead with its crown, for the sake of evil things that had worn a fair mask, of freedom that had grown into slavery, of daring that had said, "Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven."

She had erred deeply; all that was noblest, tenderest, most generous in her nature—and there was much still, despite the accusers that could appeal against her—knew it, and did not seek to palliate it to herself. The career that closed her in, once entered, as the net closes round

the bird it ensnares, had wearied her, had revolted her, had made her pride contemn the part she played, her conscience plead against the woe she worked, her nature, grand in its mould and fearless in its courage, revolt from much that she had once voluntarily sought and confessedly loved in the earlier years when it was fresh to her. And she was not happy: the simplicity of the aged recluse at Monastica had pierced to a truth that Paris, and the world, and the men who glittered round her and adored her, did not perceive. She was not happy. With her brilliance, her power, her enterprise, the fineness of her intricate intrigues, the daring of her constant adventures, the excitement of her incessant changes, no morbid sentiment, no passive pensiveness could have hold on her or be known to her, but something deeper than this was at her heart; it was the melancholy of a mute remorse, the unavailing and vainly-silenced lament of one who finds that he has bartered his gold for stones.

Her eyes were weary in all their splendor, as they followed the flight of the sea-gulls. She thought of what she had been, when only sixteen seasons had warmed the luster of her hair, yet had made her Hellenic beauty in its early blush and sudden maturity almost, even then, the beauty of her present womanhood; she thought of herself as she had stood one evening at sunset leaning down over the ivy-mantled ruins of an antique bridge in Greece, looking across to the Ægean, flashing in the light, and thinking of the centuries far away in the distance of the past when those waves had broken against the prows of Miltiades' galleys, and been crowded with the fleets of Salamis; she remembered the vivid and decorated eloquence that had wooed her then to her present path, murmuring such bright words of liberty and triumph, while the waters in their melody and the sunset in its splendor seemed filled with the grand dead names of Gracchan Rome and of Socratic Athens; she remembered how the proud imagination of her dawning life had leapt to those subtle temptings as an arrow leaps from the bow into the empyrean, and had seen in its ambitious and still childlike dreams the sovereignty of Semiramis, the sway of Aspasia, the empire of Maria Theresa, waiting in the future for her.

Eight years had gone by since then, and she had known the world deeply, widely, wisely; she had been sated with homage and with victory, she had wakened love almost wherever her glance fell; her hours had been filled with vivid color and incessant variety, with luxury and with pleasure, with the life of an adventuress in its airy nonchalance mingled with all the grace and elegance of patrician tastes, and habits, and wealth. And yet she was not happy; for the fame she had was notoriety, the power she had was used unscrupulously, in the core of the rose there was always an asp, and in the depth of her heart there were disappointment, remorse, and dishonor.

"And yet I was more sinned against than sinning," she mused. "I was so young then, and I was allured with such glorious beguilement. The regeneration of nations, the revolution of empires, the striking off of the serf's fetters, the redressing of every unjust balance, the conquest of empires and liberties, the people's homage and the monarchs' crowns—those were what tempted me. It was the old fable of Satan and Eve: 'Eat of this fruit, and ye shall have the knowledge of heaven and earth;' 'Believe in me, follow me, and you shall have glory beside which Paradise is poor, kingdoms beside which Eden is a desert!' And I took the fruit. How could I tell then that it would be all a lie?"

The thoughts floated through her mind, leaning there wearily against the lattice, while the early wind of the warm dawn stirred the half-opened scarlet blossoms of the japonica twining round it. But she was too integrally proud to seek refuge or exculpation in self-excuses even in her solitary reverie.

"Yet that is but half the truth," she mused, while her eyes still unconsciously followed the sweep of the sea-birds out to sea. "I was sinned against then, in the first, but it has been my own wrong since. I have kept to error long since I have known it to be error. I have loved my power even while I despised its means and its ends. I have felt the intoxication of hazard till I have let it entangle me beyond recall. I have known the evil I did, yet I have not paused in it when I might. I have seen the fatal issue of so much, and I have gone on and on. I

have bound them, I have blinded them, I have despoiled them, I have taken their strength and their manhood, their faith and their courage, their wealth and their genius, and ruined them all. I have spared none of them. I have betrayed so many. *That* has not been done in ignorance —*that* has not been palliated with the excuse of youth scarce conscious what it does."

Her thoughts traveled far over past years, while the sun rose higher, and while the man whose existence she had given back dreamed of her with the waking of the day, as of one so far above his love, that

> "No head save some world-genius should rest
> Above the treasures of that perfect breast."

She remained still and silent at the casement till the distant call of the drums, as the Soldan went up to the mosque for the sunrise prayers, died softly away on the air.

"I will save him at least. One sharp blow—and perhaps he will forget. Pride will aid him; and if we never meet again, I shall remain only a dream to him—a dream without pain," she said, half aloud. And, for the moment, a darker shadow swept over her face; she remembered loyal eyes that had gazed their eager passion into hers; she remembered leonine strength that would have been felled into its tomb but for her; she remembered that the man who had sought her with such untiring patience on the clew of one frail memory, would not forget in a day, in a year. But her resolve was not shaken.

"I will save him if he will be saved;—he, at least, shall have nothing to reproach me," she thought, while she watched the gray sea flash between the scarlet blossoms of the japonica tendrils. Then she turned away from the window, and rang a hand-bell that had once belonged to Catherina Medici: like the one whose long, slender palm had before touched the spiral column of its handle, she never hesitated in any course when her resolve was taken, she never swerved when once she had decided.

The Nubian slave, who attended her wherever she traveled as her maid, answered the summons from where she stood in the ante-chamber.

"Tell Paulus that I start for Naples this morning. He knows what to do. I leave by ten."

The Nubian bowed to the ground, and withdrew. Her mistress stood beside the table where the bell was placed, thoughtful still, with the shadow that had gathered on her deepening in the purple light that fell through violet curtains near. She was not a woman to whom regret was familiar;—many would have said she was too heartless: it was rather because she had seen, and known, and penetrated too much to be lightly touched;—but a great tearless pain gathered in her eyes, and her hand closed with a gesture of impatience on the sharp metal circle of the bell.

"He will be stung to the heart—and yet, better one pang at once!" she said in her solitude. "What could it avail him to know me more except to suffer longer?"

Her resolve was not changed; vacillation was impossible to her; she had none of its weakness in her nature, but a regret poignant and almost remorseful was on her. She thought of the fearless fidelity with which he had refused ever again to become as a stranger to her, she thought of the fealty that she knew so well he bore to her, that had looked out from the ardent worship of his eyes in the calm of the eastern night a few short hours before.

And she was about to kill this at a blow, because the prayer of another had pierced her heart and pleaded with her to spare him,—if it were not too late.

A new life had dawned on Erceldoune.

All his old habits of soldier-like decision, of sportsman-like activity, were broken up; he who had used to find his greatest pleasures in the saddle and the rifle, in waiting high up in a leafy nest for the lions to come down to the spring to drink, and in riding wild races with Arabs over amber stretches of torrid sand, in spending whole days alone among the sedge-pools of the Border fowl, and in bivouacking through a scorching night with Brazilian guanchos, had now changed into the veriest dreamer that ever let the long hours steal away,

> "floating up, bright forms ideal,
> Half sense-supplied, and half unreal,
> Like music mingling with a dream."

He lived in a land of enchantment, whose sole sunlight was a woman's glance; he gave himself up without a struggle to the only passion that had ever touched his life. Now and then forebodings swept over him; now and then his own utter ignorance of the woman to whom he was yielding up his destiny, smote him with a terrible pang, but very rarely: in proportion to the length of his resistance to such a subjugation, was the reckless, headlong force of his fall into its power. Moreover, his nature was essentially unsuspecting; and he had an old-world chivalry in him that would have made it seem to him the poorest poltroonery to cast doubt on the guardian-angel who had saved him from the very jaws of death. His mother, lost in his earliest childhood, had been of Spanish race; neglected by her lord, she had been left to break her spirit as she would against the gray walls of the King's Rest, longing for the perfume and the color and the southern winds of her home in the Vega, while the Border moors stretched round her, and the Cheviots shut her in until she died, like a tropic bird, caged in cold and in twilight. A softness, inherited from the tenderness and the enthusiasm of her southern blood, was latent in her son, little as he knew it; an unworldliness and trustfulness were in his nature, though he did not perceive them; and though his career had done much to strengthen the lion-like daring and athlete's hardihood of his character, on the other hand the picturesque coloring and varied wandering in which his years had been spent had done much to preserve the vein of romance within him, unworn while unsuspected. Nothing had touched this side of his nature until now; and now, the stronger for its past suppression, it conquered him in its turn, and ruled alone.

When he left her that evening he could not sleep; he rode far and fast through the late night, dashing down into the interior, along sandy plains, and through cypress groves, across stretches of tangled vegetation, and over the rocky beds of dried-up brooks, or the foam of tumbling freshets. The swift rush through the cooled air soothed the fever in him; his thoughts and his passions kept throbbing time with the beat of the hoofs, with the sweep of the gallop. He loved her, he thought;—oh! God, how he loved her!

So long ago loved his namesake the Rhymer, when under the tree of Erceldoune—the Tree of Grammarye—the sorceress lips touched his, and the eyes brighter than mortal brightness looked into his own; lips that wooed him across the dark Border, eyes that dared him to brave the Lake of Fire for her sake. Those old, old legends! —how they repeat themselves in every age, in every life.

With the dawn he came upon a pool, lying land-locked, far and solitary, encircled with cedars and cypress and superb drooping boughs, now heavy with the white blossoms of the sweet chestnut, and while his horse drank at the brink, he threw himself in to bathe, dipping down into the clear brown waters, and striking out into the depths of green blossoming shade, while the swell of a torrent that poured into it lashed him with its foam, cold even in the east before sunrise, and hurled the mass of water against his limbs, firm-knit, sinewy, colossal as the polished limbs of a Roman bronze of Milo. As he shook the drenching spray from his hair, and swam against the current, looking upward at the sky where the dawn was just breaking, all the beauty that life might know seemed suddenly to rise on him in revelation. There is an eastern fable that tells how, when Paradise faded from earth, a single rose was saved and treasured by an angel, who gives to every mortal, sooner or later in his life, one breath of fragrance from the immortal flowers—one alone. The legend came to his memory as the sunbeams deepened slanting spear-like across the azure of the skies, and he dashed down into the shock of the waters to still in him this fierce sweetness of longing for all that would never be his own.

One woman alone could bring to him that perfume of Paradise; the rose of Eden could only breathe its divine fragrance on him from her lips. And he would have given all the years of his life to have it come to him one hour.

When the day was at noon he went to her, heeding no more the downpour of the scorching vertical rays than the Rhymer had heeded the leaping tongues of flame while he rode, with the golden tresses sweeping his lips, down to the glories of Fœrie. Distinct thought, distinct expectance, he had none; he had but one instinct, to see her, to be with her, to lay down at her feet the knightliest service

that ever man gave to woman. He knew nothing of her, knew not whether she were wedded or unwedded, but he knew that the world had one meaning alone for him now —he loved her. That she could ever answer it, he had barely the shadow of a hope: there was much humility in him; he held himself but at a lowly account; though a proud man with men, he would have felt, had he ever followed out his thoughts, that he had nothing with which to merit or to win the haughty and brilliant loveliness of Idalia; he would have felt that he had no title, and no charm, to gain her and gather her into arms that would be strong, indeed, to defend her until the last breath of life, as they had been strong to strangle the bear in the death grasp and to tame the young wild horse on the prairies, but that had no gold to clasp and fling down at her feet, no purples of state and of wealth to fold round her, bringing their equal royalty to hers. That he himself could attract her, he would have had little belief; he did not see himself as others saw him; he did not know that his vigorous magnificence of form, his dauntless manhood, his generous unselfishness, his untrammeled freedom of thought and deed, might charm a woman who had been tired by all, won by none; he was unconscious of any of these in his own person, and he would have thought that he had nothing on earth which could give him the right ever to hope for her tenderness. But hope is always strong in us till despair is forced on us, however little we may know that hope's existence; and thought was the last thing that was shaped in him—thought never grouped itself before him; he was still in the opium-dream; neither future nor past existed for him; he was drunk with his present; his love blinded him to any other memory than itself. It was too wholly in its early freshness for it to forecast its fate.

His eyes eagerly swept over the building as he rode up the avenue; the lattices were all closed; this was usual in the noon, yet it gave him a vague disquietude and dread. The echo of his step resounded on the marble, as it had done when he had forced his entrance into what he had believed the lair of his assassin: it was the only sound, and the stillness froze his heart like ice: the rolling bay

of the hound had never before failed to challenge his arrival.

The first court was deserted; in the second he saw the Abyssinian.

"The Countess Vassalis?" he asked, rapidly.

"Is not here," answered the negress.

"Not here!"

"No, most illustrious. Her Excellency left Stamboul this morning."

He staggered like a man who has received a blow.

"Left—where?—why?—for how long?"

The Abyssinian shook her head with a profound salaam; she knew nothing, or would say nothing; her mistress had left Constantinople; where she intended to travel she could not tell; her Excellency was always traveling, she believed; but a note had been given her to deliver to the English Effendi, perhaps that might tell more.

He seized it from her as she drew it from the yellow folds of her sash, and tore it open; a mist was before his sight, and his wrist shook while he held the paper as it had never done lifting the rifle to his shoulder, when one error in the bullet's flight would have been instant death to himself. The letter brought him little solace; it was but a few words of graceful courtesy, giving him the adieu that a sudden departure rendered necessary, but adding nothing of why or whither she was gone, and seeming, in their polished ceremonial, cold as ice to the storm of shattered hope and tempestuous pain that was rife in his own heart. Instinctively as his hand closed on it he turned away from the Abyssinian, and went out of the court into the hot blaze of day, alone; he could not bear the eyes of even that African upon him in the desolation that had swept down upon his life. He went out; where, he did not see or know, passing into the scorching air and into the cooler shade of the groves, with a blind, dumb suffering on him like the suffering of a dog. For her he had no pride, against wounds from her hand he had no shield; and nothing with which she could wring his heart, nothing with which she could try his loyalty, could avail to turn his love away. They had been no idle words with which he had said that his life was hers to do with what she would; hav

ing made the vow he would keep it, no matter what the test, or what the cost.

He crushed in his grasp that pitiless letter;—her hand had touched it, her hand had written it, bitter as it was it was sacred to him; and he stood in the vertical sun, gazing blankly down on the waves below the terraces, tossing upward in the light at his feet. The blow had fallen on him with a crushing, sickening force,—again he had lost her! Again, when to the old baffled weariness with which he had so long vainly sought her was added the certainty that he who had lavished his heart's best treasure on her was no more to her than the yellow sands that the seas kissed and left.

A few hours before and her eyes had smiled on him, her presence had been with him; she had listened to him, spoken with him, let him linger beside her in all the familiar communion of a welcome friendship; he could not realize that he was forsaken by her without a word, without a regret, without an effort for them ever to meet again. He had no claim on her remembrance, no title to her confidence, it was true; his acquaintance with her was slight, as the world would have considered. But he could not realize that the tie between them of a life saved, so powerful on him, so deathless in its memory for him, could be as nothing to her. The wanton cruelty of her desertion seemed to him so merciless that he had no remembrance of how little hold he had, in reason and in fact, upon her tenderness. The knowledge of her loss alone was on him, leaving him no consciousness save of the burning misery that possessed him.

As he had never loved, so he had never suffered until now; his adventurous career in camps, and cities, and deserts, had never been touched by any grief; he had come there in the gladness of the morning, full of faith, of hope, of eager delight, and of unquestioning expectation, and he stood in the scorch of the noonday heat, stupefied, the glare of sun and sea unfelt in the fiery agony that had seized him.

The little gilded caïque was rocking at his feet, where it was moored to the landing-stairs; trifles link thought to thought, and with the memory of that first enchanted

hour when he had floated with her down the water, he remembered the warning that she had given him—the warning "not to lie under the linden."

The warning had been—she had said—for his sake, not her own; was it for his that she had left him now? She had implied that some sort of peril, some threatening of danger, must await him with her friendship; was it to save him from these that she had left him thus? Then the humility that was as integrally a part of his nature, as his lofty pride of race was toward men, subdued the bitter sense of her cruelty: what was he more to her than any other to whom she gave her gracious courtesies that he should look for recollection from her? He owed her his life;—but that debt lay on him, it left no claim to her. What was there in him that he could hope in their brief intercourse to have become any dearer to her than any other chance-met acquaintance of the hour? He could not upbraid her with having smiled on him one hour to forsake him as a stranger the next, for with the outset she had bade him leave her unknown.

Hot tears, the first that had ever come there since as a child he had sobbed over his young mother's grave, rushed into his eyes, shutting out the stretch of the sparkling seas and the rich coloring around him, where Cashmere roses and Turkish lilies bloomed in untrained luxuriance. The sea had no freedom, the flowers no fragrance, the green earth in its early summer no beauty for him;—he only felt that let him spend loyalty, fidelity, life and peace upon her as he would, he might never be one shadow nearer to her than he was now, he might never touch her to one breath of tenderness, never move her to one pang of pity. His strength was great, he had wrestled with the gaunt northern bear in the cold of a Scandinavian night, he had fought with ocean and storm in the madness of a tropical tempest, he had closed with the African lion in a fierce embrace, and wrenched the huge jaws apart as they closed on their prey; he had prevailed in these things by fearless force, by human might: but now, in his weakness and his misery, he could have flung himself down on the tawny sands and wept like a woman for the hopes that were scattered, for the glory that was dead.

Another moment, and he had crossed the labyrinth of the garden, thrown himself into saddle, and turned back toward the city. The Greeks idly lying under the shelter of their fishing or olive feluccas drawn up on the shore, and the Turks sitting on their cocoa-nut mats under the shadow of fig-tree or vine at the entrance of their huts, stared aghast at the breathless horse, thundering along the sea-road through the noontide heat, his flanks covered with foam, and the white burnous of his Giaour rider floating out upon the wind. Down the steep pathways, over the jagged rocks, across the flat burning levels of sand, and under the leaning grape-covered walls, Erceldoune rode, reckless of danger, unconscious of the fierce sun-fire pouring on his head.

He had sworn to follow her, whether her route were seaward to Europe, or eastward into the wild heart of Asia. Pride, reason, wounded feeling, wavering faith, none of them availed to turn him from his course. He was true to his oath; and the madness was upon him that in the golden verse of his namesake the Rhymer makes Syr Tristam love better to go back to the risk of death and shame, to the land of his foe, to the old piercing pain and the old delicious sorcery, than to live in peace and honor and royalty without the smile of King Marc's wife, without the light of Ysonde's eyes. Let come what would, he followed Idalia.

In the feeling he bore her there was a strange mingling of utter humility, of most reverential chivalry, with the wildest passion and the most reckless daring; in it the two sides of his nature were blent.

He rode to the Golden Horn, where the flags of every nation were streaming from the crowded masts in the clear hot light. He knew that her departure by any one of the vessels could easily be ascertained.

To seek the guests whom he had met at her house; to inquire of her from the numerous acquaintance he had among the various chancelleries in Constantinople, and the military and naval men passing through or staying off there; to ask who she was, whence she came, how she was held in social estimation; all that might have been the natural course of most was impossible to Erceldoune.

He could not have brought himself to speak of her to others; he felt that if he heard her name lightly uttered, he should strike his hand on the mouth that uttered it; and intense as his longing might be to pierce the mystery that apparently shrouded her, the quixotic code of his love and his honor would have let him ask nothing through strangers that she withheld herself. He prosecuted his search alone, and the rapidity in such investigations gained by habit soon brought him the knowledge he pursued.

Before evening he had learned among the sailors in the port that a steam yacht belonging to her, the *Io*, which had returned twenty-four hours previously from Athens, had taken its departure early in the morning; for Capri, the Greek crew had said, with no one on board but herself, her suite, and the Silesian dog. The yacht was probably by now through the Dardanelles. It was well known in the Golden Horn, the sailors told him, that she usually came from Europe in it; it could be recognized anywhere on the seas, for it always carried the green white and scarlet of the Italian national colors, crossed on the Greek ensign—a fancy, it was supposed, of her Excellency's.

Erceldoune's eyes strained across the glittering expanse of water with a wistful longing as he listened; every word he gathered plunged like a knife into his heart;—no steamer went from the harbor that day to Naples; with twelve or twice twelve hours between them, how could he tell but what again she might be lost to him, how or where or when he might ever recover the clew she had rent asunder?

"If that schooner were only mine!" he muttered unconsciously aloud, as his glance fell on a yacht in the harbor, with her gold figure-head and her brass swivel guns glistening in the sun;—his want of wealth he had never felt, his nature was too high-toned, his habits too hardy, his temper too bold; but now for the first time the pang of his beggared fortunes struck heavily on him. Were wealth his own, how soon the seas that severed them might be bridged!

A familiar hand was struck on his shoulder as he stood looking across at the gray arc of the Bosphorus, straining

his eyes into the offing as though he could pierce the distance and follow her with his gaze.

"You want a yacht? Take *Etoile*. I am going inland on a special mission into Arabia; bring her back in a year's time; that will be soon enough for me."

Erceldoune turned and saw a man he knew well; a true and tried friend; one with whom he had gone on many a perilous expedition; a dauntless traveler, a pure Arabic scholar, and a skilled negotiator with Eastern chiefs and tribes.

The *Etoile* was at his service, with her captain and her crew, to take him where he would; there remained but the duties of the Messenger Service to detain him, and these, on application, let him loose. He had so habitually abstained throughout the twenty years of his service from any effort to shirk or shift the most dangerous or most irksome missions, that as nothing specially required him then, and a courier was daily expected from Russia who could take dispatches home in his place, he easily obtained his furlough, and by sunset he weighed anchor.

The yacht steered out of the varied fleet of merchantmen that crowded the Golden Horn, steered out to the open sea, while the scarlet glory of the after-glow lingered in the skies, and dyed the waters blood-red in its light. To what fate did he go? he asked himself.

Safer, wiser, better far, he thought, that he should turn back with his familiar comrade, and plunge down into the core of Asia, into the old athletic, bracing open-air life, into the pleasures that had never palled of forest and rifle, of lake and mountain, of the clear ringing shot and the wild day-dawn gallop, into the pastimes that had no taint in them, the chase that had no pang in it. That old life had been so free, so elastic, so unshadowed, with all the liberty of the desert, with all the zest of hardihood in it, with no thought for the morrow, and no regret for the past, with sleep sound as a mountaineer's, with strength exhaustless as the sea eagle's. He was leaving it. And for what? For a love that already had cost him a year of pain to a few short hours of hope; for a woman of whom he knew nothing—not even whether she were the wife or the mistress of another; for the miserable fever

of restless passion, for the haunting torment of unattainable joys, for the intoxication of tempest-tossed desires, for the shadows of surrounding doubt and mystery. Better far let the strange charm that had enthralled him be cut away at any cost, and go back to that old life while there was yet time. The thought crossed him for the moment as he drifted from the quay of the Golden Horn. The next it passed as swiftly; let him plunge into the recesses of Asia or the green depths of Western wilds, he would carry with him his passion and her memory; and the vessel swept down beyond the Dardanelles in her pursuit, through the phosphor crests of starlit waves as the night deepened, and the distance between them grew less and less with every dip the prow made down into the deep-gray glistening water, like a petrel that stoops to bathe in his passage, and shakes the spray from his spread wings to take a freer flight.

It was evening when she ran into Capri, that Eden hung beneath the sea and sky. All its marvelous maze of color was in its richest glow; the sun was sinking behind Solaro; the towering rocks of the Salto and the Faraglioni burned through their sublimity of gloom; a luster of gold and purple streamed over mountainous Ischia down on the brow of Epomeneo, and over the low hills of Procida; and the blue water lay dazzling in the light, with the white sails of Sorrento skiffs scarce larger on its waves than the white wings of fluttering monachi, while over the sea came the odors of budding orange and citron gardens and a world of violets that filled the woods, sloping upward and upward into the clouds where Anacapri lay.

Erceldoune saw none of it, yet he felt it vaguely—felt, as his vessel steered through that flood of sunlight, coming from the rich *mezzo giorno* of the Amalfi coast into the golden riot of this lavish loveliness, as though he floated to a paradise. So had they thought before him, who, sailing through those caressing seas toward the same isles where the Syrens sang, had listened to the enchanted song to find their grave, in tumult and in storm.

The sun sank behind Ischia as he went ashore, and the sudden twilight fell, quenching all the blaze of fire, and

bringing in its stead the tender night, with the chime of the Ave Maria ringing out from church bells over the sea.

He was known in Capri, and the men showed their white teeth with a bright smile, and the girls laughed all over their handsome brown faces, as they welcomed him.

He had little doubt of soon learning what he sought; a few brief questions brought him loquacious answers.

"Niursi, signore!" cried a *marinaro*, in the barbarous Capriote patois. "L'illustrissima Comtessa! she knows me well. Chiara, my wife, helped the African carry the luggage up to her villa the day before yesterday——"

"She is here still?"

The quick Capriote caught the tremulous excitement that ran through the question, and his heart warmed to the stranger, by whom his brother had once been brought up from the black churning waves under Tiberio in the dead of a tempestuous night.

"She is here, signor mio; she has been often here. She is at the Villa Santilla, in the Piccola Mariana. I will show you the way willingly."

"No, I can find it; I know every foot of your island. But if you can get me a horse, do."

The *marinaro* put back the gold held out to him with a loving gesture, and a smile that glistened through his brown beard:

"Not from *you*, signor. We have not forgotten, in Capri here, the night after San Costanza's Day."

Awhile later, and Erceldoune passed up the terraced heights, through the woods, where he crushed starry cyclomen and late violets at every step, along hedges of prickly pear inclosing vineyards and fields of flax, and down rocky winding stairs shut in by walls, over which hung the white blossoms of orange boughs.

Now and then he passed a village priest, or a contadina that was like a study for Giorgone, or a tourist party whose mules were stumbling down some narrow gorge or dense arbutus thicket; these were all; the solitude was well-nigh unbroken. He knew Capri as well as he knew the old Scottish border at home; many a time, waiting week after week at Naples for dispatches, he had explored every creek, rock, and islet in that marvelous bay, from

sunlit Amalfi to nestling Procida, and he made his way straight onward to the Piccola Mariana, though slowly, from the steepness and the vagaries of the broken Roman roads, overgrown with luxuriant vegetation, that his horse, a sturdy mountain-trained chestnut from Ischia, climbed cautiously.

A late hour was sounding from some campanile as he rode into that beautiful nook that lies turned toward Sicily, with its line of fisher-boats and white-walled cottages fringing the coast, and hidden among olives, cistus groves, and orangeries. Here and there—where strangers had made their dwelling—lights were gleaming, but the Capriotes all lay sleeping under their low rounded roofs; he almost despaired of finding any guide to tell him which villa was hers in that leafy nest among the sea-girt rocks.

At last he overtook a contadina heavily laden with wood, doing the work of pack-horses, as is the common custom for women in the isles of the Syrens; she knew the name; the Contessa had bought some coral of her, for pity's sake, yesterday; the villa was down there in that little gorge just hanging over the sea, where the gray plumes of olive were thickest.

If any had asked it, he could not have answered with what definite purpose he went, whether to see her, whether to break on her privacy at such an hour, whether only to look on the place where she dwelt, and watch till the day should dawn; fixed aim he had none; he was urged by an impulse as vague as it was unconquerable, unregulated either by reason or by motive. He was in that mood in which chance does its best, or its worst, for a man; when he offers no resistance to it, and may even be hurried into guilt ere he knows what he does.

The lights were shining among the shades of olive and arbutus woods as his horse stumbled down the narrow defile, catching in the trailing vine tendrils at every step.

The dwelling literally overhung the sea, nestled on a low ridge of rock, curved round so that the whole arc of the bay, sweeping from east to west, was commanded by its windows, that saw the sun rise over the height of St. Angelo, fall in its noonday glory full on Naples, and Vesuvius, and Baiæ, where they lie in the depth of that won-

drous bow, and pass on to die in purple pomp behind wild Ischia. It was surrounded with all the profuse growth of the island; thickets of cistus, wilderness of myrtle, budding fig-trees, orangeries with their crowns of bridal blossom and their balls of amber fruit, while vast rocks rose above and shelved beneath it, with columns that towered to the clouds, and terraced ledges and broken gorges filled up with foliage. Through the leaves he saw the gleam of open windows, and the indistinct outline of the roof in the deep shade cast from the rocks above; the road he had followed ended abruptly on a narrow table of stone jutting out over a precipice whose depth he could not guess; and immediately fronting the casements from which the light streamed, divided from the terrace and strip of garden running beneath them, by a chasm perhaps some six feet wide. Thus from the rock he saw straight into the lighted chamber within, as he threw himself from his horse, and with his arm round a plane-tree to hold his footing, leaned over the edge and strained his eyes through the gloom to gaze into the interior that was before him like a picture painted on the shadow of the night. His heart stood still with a sickening pang, a deadly burning jealousy that had never touched his life before. Through the draperies of the curtains he saw her, and saw her—not alone. She sat at the head of her table, that glittered with wax-lights and fruits and wines, and with her were some six or seven men, whose voices only reached him in a low inarticulate murmur, but whose laughter now and then echoed on his ear in the silence. At the foot of the table sat one whom he recognized at once; his back was to the windows, but the slight grace of his figure, and the elegance of his throat and head, with its closely-cut blond hair, sufficed to identify him to Erceldoune. What tie could he have to her, this cold, smiling, silken politician, who seemed perpetually by her side? In the warm night he shook as with icy chillness through all his veins; a brute longing seized him to spring like a lion into that dainty group, and fell them down as men of his blood in Bothwell's days had felled their foes in Border feuds,

"when the loud corynoch rang for war
Through Lorne, Argyle, Monteith, and Braidalbane."

Her other guests were all unknown to him, and looked like gentlemen-condottieri; moreover, all he saw was Idalia: she was leaning slightly forward, her face was lighted with impassioned warmth, while her eyes, fixed upon the man nearest her, an Italian by the contour of his features, and of a careless princely bearing, that gave him greater distinction than the rest displayed, adjured him more eloquently still, than by the words with which her lips were moving.

The echo of her voice, though not the meaning of her speech, came to Erceldoune where he swung forward over the chasm in the hushed night, sweet and fatal as the Syren voices that had used to echo over those eternal seas that lapped the beach below. And as he heard it, a heart-sick misery seemed to make his life desolate; he had shaped no definite hope, his thoughts had known no actual form, but his love unconsciously had colored both hope and thought: she so utterly filled his own life, he could not at once realize that he was nothing, not even a remembrance in hers.

He leaned nearer and nearer, regardless of the unfathomed precipice that yawned beneath him. At that instant Victor Vane rose, pushed back his chair, and approached the open glass doors; looking out from the brightly-lighted room, he could see the shadow of the man and horse upon the opposite ledge.

"The Romans hung their wreaths of roses over the doors, we in a mere prosaic age must shut our windows," he said, with a light laugh, as he closed the venetian blinds, leaving only their thread-like chinks open for the passage of light outward, and the passage of air within.

A great darkness fronted Erceldoune; the moon was shining on all the silvered seas, and innumerable stars were out, but for him the blackness and blindness of night had never so utterly fallen.

Hours passed by uncounted, unheeded by him; the chimes of the campanile had chimed twelve, and one, and two, unheard by him; he was still there before the darkened windows. The Ischian horse grazed quietly off the grasses and young shoots among the rocks; Erceldoune watched the villa which sheltered her, as a lion watches the lair of his foe.

The night was absolute torture to him; intolerable suspense possessed him, and a reckless hatred of all those who were now within the chamber on which he was forbidden even to look. So near to her, and yet as far sundered as though seas divided them! His rivals with her while he stood without!—his imagination was filled with their looks, their words, the bold passion in their eyes, the lovely smile upon her lips. What were they, what title could they claim to her, these men, who seemed so welcome to her? Something in the familiarity, the authority, of the Englishman's action, slight though it was, bore to him a terrible significance; were her revelries such as those for which the rose was hung above the doors of Rome?—were they the revelries of a Faustina? The thought passed over him, cold, gliding, poisonous as the coil of a snake; he flung it from him with fierce loathing, true to the motto of his old race, "One loyalty, one faith"—he had given both to her. He heeded neither time nor place; purpose he had none in staying there; to watch her life with suspicion or espionage was the last thought in him, the last baseness possible to him; but he could not tear himself from the place, he was fascinated to it, even by the very torment of his pain. How utterly she must have forgotten him!—how utterly careless must she be of what suffering she had dealt him! As he thought of the look that he had seen on her face, as he thonght of those men gathered about her while he was absent, he paced the narrow rocky ridge like a man chained to his cell, while his foes riot in all that he has loved and treasured. And the closed casements faced him like an inexorable doom, while a faint glimmer of light that here and there streamed through them seemed to mock him with fugitive tormenting glimpse, only serving to make the darkness darker still.

At last, when the grayness of dawn was breaking, there was a slight noise that stirred the stillness: the shutter unclosed, the glass door opened, he saw her—alone. There was no one now in the apartment, and she stood in the open window looking out on the sea that stretched far below, round the broken and jutting cliffs.

He leaned down scarcely breathing, till he hung half way over the chasm · was it possible that in this solitude

she thought of him? Were those men anything to her, or was he more than they, or nothing?—not even a regret?

The moon at that moment strayed through on to the ledge, and she saw his shadow hanging midway down over the precipice, whose fatal depth, slanted straight into the sea which had worn a narrow way through the fissure five hundred feet below. A cry of horror broke from her that had a greater tenderness in it than lies only in a mere fear for life imperiled; for all answer he swung himself one moment on the ledge, balanced the distance with an unerring eye, and with a mountaineer's leap that the glens and hills of the Border had taught him long before, cleared the space and alighted at her feet.

"Does it matter to you whether I live or die?"

The brief prayer bore eloquence deeper than lies in ornate words; all the man's heart was spent in it; Idalia stood motionless and silent, her eyes fixed on him where he stood beside her, dropped as from the air upon the wild cliffs in the dead of night, when she believed him far distant on those eastern shores to which the sea beneath them ebbed away through league on league of starlight.

"Does it matter to you whether I live or die?" he said afresh, while his voice quivered with a fiery piteous entreaty.

"Surely! It mattered to me when you were but a stranger."

A vivid joy thrilled through him, his eyes in the shadow burned down into hers with passionate appeal, with passionate reproach.

"Ay, but it was only a divine pity *then*, is it that only now? And, with but pity in you for me, how could you deal me this last misery?"

What stirred her heart he could not tell.

"I bade you know no more of me," she said at last, while her eyes looked away from him down into the still and silvered seas. "I told you nothing but bitterness could come to you from my friendship; nothing else can. Why would you not believe me while it was time?"

There was an intense and weary mournfulness in the words; they carried a deadly meaning to him, he gave them but one significance.

"You mean that even your memory is forbidden me?—that even my worship of you dishonors you?"

She drew her hands from him.

"Your words are as strange as your presence here. This is the time and place for neither."

"My words are strange! God help me! I hardly know what I say. Answer me, in pity's sake, what are they to you?"

"Who?"

And as she spoke, beneath the unbent hauteur of her voice and of her glance there was something as nearly kindred to anxiety and alarm as could approach Idalia's nature.

"Those men who were with you."

"Let me pass, sir. These are not questions for which you have right, or to which I give submission."

"I swear they shall be answered! What *are* they to you?"

She glanced at him in haughty amaze, tinged with some other feeling that he could not translate.

"You dare address me thus! Are you mad?"

"I think so!"

"I think so also," she said, coldly. "And now, sir, there is an end of these unwarranted questions, which you have as little title to ask as I have inclination to answer. Leave me, or let me pass."

He stood in her path, half mad as he said:

"I will know one thing—are you any man's wife?"

Utter surprise passed over her face, and something of contemptuous annoyance.

"I reply to nothing asked in such a manner," she said briefly. "Let me pass, sir."

"No! Tell me this one thing for the love of pity!"

The anguish in his voice touched her; she paused a moment.

"It can concern you in no way," she answered him distantly. "But since you ask it—know that I cherish freedom too well to be wedded."

"I thank God,—I may love you without sin."

His voice was very low, and his words had a greater intensity because their passion was restrained in obedience

to her: there was grandeur in their very simplicity. She raised her head with her old stag-like gesture—looking to the sea, and not to him.

"Sir, you have no title to speak such words. You cannot say that I have ever given you the faintest."

"Have I ever said it? No! you have given me no title, but I claim one."

"Claim!"

"I claim one. The title that every man has to love, though he go unloved—to love better than life, and only less than honor."

He spoke steadily, undauntedly, as became his own self-respect and dignity, but his voice had an accent which told her that world-wide as the love had been that she had roused, none ever had loved her as this man did. For a moment she turned and looked at him, a look fleeting, and veiled from him by the flickering shadows. The look was soon banished, and her eyes strayed backward to the sea; her face was very pale, but she moved away with her proud and languid grace:

"These words are painful to us both;—no more of them, sir. Farewell."

The word struck him as a shot strikes one of his Border deer; in the impulse of his agony he caught her trailing dress, and held it as a sentenced captive might hold the purple hem of his sovereign's robes.

"Stay! A moment ago you said you cared whether I lived or died;—as I live now I will die to-night—in that sea at your feet—if you tell me to leave you forever."

A shudder ran through her; looking down on him she saw that fatigue, long fasting, the misery of the past hours, and the force of the feeling he bore her, had unloosed his passions and unstrung his nerves till his brain was giddy; and—his calm failing him—she saw that in every likelihood, as surely as the stars shone above them, he would keep his word and fling away his whole existence for her.

Commonly she was too careless of men's lives as of their peace; but here she could not be so. She had saved him, she could not so soon again destroy him.

"Hush!" she said more softly. "The noblest woman would never be worth *that!* It would be better that we

should part. When I tell you that it can bring you no happiness——"

"Whatever it bring, I said before, I accept it! My life is yours to save or throw away, as you will; answer me, which shall it be?"

There was a suppressed violence, a terrible suffering, in his voice, that moved her almost with such shuddering pain as though she witnessed his death before her sight; in the light falling from the opened windows she could see the burning gleam in his eyes and the red flush that darkened the bronze of his face.

"Live!" she answered him, while her own voice lost its chillness. "You do not know now what you say; with calmer hours you will see how little worth it I or any woman could be. You may meet me again,—but you must speak no more of such words as you have spoken to-night. I have your promise?"

"Till my strength shall fail me to keep it."

"When it does, we shall meet no more."

Then she left him, and passed through the chamber that was opened to the night, till, in the distance, the clustered flowers and statues veiled her among them, and the closing of a door echoed with a dull sound through the stillness.

He stood alone on the terrace, the noise of the sea surging in his ear, his pulse beating, his brain reeling: he could not tell what to believe, what to trust, what to think.

The frank, loyal, single-hearted nature of the man had too honest a mould, too masculine a cast, to follow or to divine the complex intricacies of a woman's life, of a woman's impulses and motives. He felt blinded, powerless, heart-sick, dizzy, now crushed with reckless despair at the chill memory of her words, now touched with sweet wild hope, because he thought her free to be won if daring, fidelity, and devotion could avail to win her.

To doubt her, never—even now, even with all that he had seen and heard—occurred to him. He believed that she might only pity him with proud cold pity; he believed that it was faintly, remotely possible that by force of his own mighty love some tenderness might be at last wakened for him in her heart. But between these he saw no path.

He never thought that she might be—but fooling, and destroying him.

He had comparatively seen little of women; nothing of such a woman as Idalia. His bold and sanguine nature quickly grasped at hope; even in all the humility of his love it was not in him to surrender.

Till morning broke beyond the giant mass of St. Angelo, he paced up and down the cliffs, with the waves beating music at his feet. Then he flung himself down on the moss that covered a ledge of the rock, with his saddle beneath his head, as he had lain many a night under Asiatic stars, and on Andes slopes, and on yellow Libyan sand; physical fatigue brought sleep, and sleep was gentler to him than his waking life, it gave him dreams, and with his dreams Idalia.

CHAPTER XIV.

"SHE SMILES THEM DOWN IMPERIALLY AS VENUS DID THE WAVES."

As she passed from him through the embrasure of the myrtle-shrouded window, and crossing her reception-room, entered an inner chamber, at the farther end stood Victor Vane—too far to have heard what had been spoken, yet near enough through the suite of apartments to have seen out on the terrace above the sea. A few minutes before he had left the villa with her other guests, whose boats were taking them across to Naples; now he had returned and awaited her, half with the familiarity of a man who shared her confidence, half with the hesitation of one who fears he may give offense.

"You are here still; and so late! I suppose you bring news of importance you could not give before them?" she said, with a shade of annoyance in the languor of her voice. He had approached with a quick step, an eager warmth upon his face; he was checked and chilled, vaguely yet

irresistibly, as he met her glance. He was rarely to be daunted, still less rarely to be shamed; yet he was both now. He paused involuntarily, his eyes fell, and words died on his lips, as he bowed before her.

"And your intelligence?" she asked.

"Intelligence? Caffradali has deserted us."

Idalia lifted her eyebrows.

"He is as well lost as retained. What else?"

"You know that the Ducroscs will send twenty thousand rifles into Poland, and that Falkenstein goes to take command of the Towariez?"

She gave a gesture of impatience.

"He will 'command' them when they are organized—*when!* It was I who sent him. This can scarcely be your intelligence—your intelligence that will not wait till to-morrow?"

He hesitated, with a strangely novel embarrassment upon him.

"I waited—to congratulate you on your conquest of the Prince to the cause."

A light of triumph gave its pride to her eyes, and its warmth to her brow; she smiled, as with the memory of victory.

"Viana! Yes—it is something to have secured him, semi-Bourbon that he is! But I still remain at a loss to imagine why you reappear at this time of the night."

A flush of anger heated the delicate coldness of her listener's face, his silken and gentle courtesies were forgotten for the moment.

"Such an hour, madame! It is not too late for that wild wanderer yonder to be favored with an interview!"

The moment the words escaped him he repented them; he knew how rash they were with the nature and disdainful dignity of the woman to whom he spoke. Idalia cast one glance on him of superb indifference; but she gave no betrayal of surprise, not even of disquiet, far less of embarrassment.

"If you only came to arraign my actions, I will be obliged to you to retire."

"Wait! Hear me first! I can act indifference no longer. I came back to-night for one thing only—to tell you what

you know, as well as you know that the stars shine yonder —that I love you!"

She heard him with that same royal indifference, and ironic amusement.

"I think we are too well acquainted with each other for this. I gave you more credit than to suppose *you* would talk in this fashion."

He looked up at her with a passionate pain; he had been heartless, and been proud of his heartlessness; he had mocked all his life through at what other men felt and suffered, and passion or tenderness had been alike the subject of his most cutting sneer; but—for the moment, at least—his creed had deserted him, his wisdom and his sarcasm had failed him; for the moment he loved, as utterly as ever a lover did, and he felt powerless to make her credit it. But eloquence was always at his bidding, and eloquence came now; every honeyed flattery, every imploring eagerness, every impassioned pleading, that could warm or shake the heart of the woman who heard him, poured from his lips. Persuasive always, he was a thousandfold more so now that for the first time in his existence genuine passion had broken up his callousness, and a sense of hopelessness shivered his self-reliance. He loved her, if it were but a mingling of desire, of ambition, of senses intoxicated by her beauty, of pride piqued by her disdain; and he felt impotent to make her even believe this—far more impotent to make her accept it.

She heard him without interruption, smiling a little as she heard; she was half wearied, half amused, as at a comedy known and stale from custom, yet amusing because well acted.

"Monsieur, I gave you credit for better taste," she said, quietly, as he paused. "I have had so much of this so often; granted you are unusually eloquent, unusually graceful, but even with those accessories the tale is very tiresome; and it has one great drawback, you see—we neither of us believe it!"

"Believe! how can I make you believe? I tell you that ever since I saw you first I have been so changed that I have wondered if I lived or dreamed; I have felt all that once I disdained as only fit for boys and fools!

What more can I tell you?—you must *know* that I speak truth."

"What a recantation! I am not a fitting hearer for it at all, nor likely to appreciate it. I will thank you far more to amuse me with your bonmots, which are really good, than to entertain me with your efforts in Romeo's strain, which, though very pretty, are very stale!"

"Wait!—for pity's sake. Doubt what you will, mock at what you will, but believe at least that I love you!"

She laughed softly.

"We do not believe in love—*nous autres!*"

"And yet men have gone to their death only for love of you!"

"No proof of wisdom if they did!"

A little while before he had thought as she thought; a few months earlier and his incredulity of every such madness and emotion was not more scornful than her own; now, intoxicated with the disdainful beauty of the only woman who had ever cost him a moment's pang, he believed in all the wildest follies of romance, and would have staked everything he owned on earth, or wagered on the future, to move her and to win her. For the only time in his life he was baffled, for the only time powerless. His hands clinched where he stood before her.

"Hear me at the least before you banish me. Listen! what is there we might not compass together? You adore sovereignty, it should go hard if I did not give it you. You are ambitious, your ambition cannot overleap mine. We are both against the world, together we would subdue it. Empty thrones have fallen to hands bold enough to grasp them as they reel through revolutions; you and I might wear a crown if our aims and power were one. Love me, and there is no height I will not raise you to, no ordeal I will not pass through for you, no living man who shall baffle or outrun me. I have the genius that rules worlds —I would lay one at your feet."

Every word that he uttered he meant; in the excitation of the instant, sweeping down all the suave and hardened coldness of his temperament, he felt the power in him to do and to dare greatly; he felt that for her, through her,

with her, there should be no limit to the ambition and the triumph of his life; he spoke wildly, blindly, exaggeratedly, but he spoke with an exaltation that for the second made him a nobler and truer man than he had been in all the cool scorn of his wisdom and his mockery. Yet he did not move her, much less did he win her.

She looked at him with a smile in her eyes, and a haughty languor in her attitude. She—merciless from knowing the world too well, and gifted with a penetration far beyond the common range of women—saw that the gold offered her was adulterated; that the springs of his speech were as much self-love as love.

"I understand you," she said, as he paused. "I could advance your ambitions well, and you would be glad that I should do so; your vanity, your policy, your schemes, and—perhaps a little, too—your admiration, are all excited and chime in with another one; and that compound you call love. Well, it is as good a name for it as anything else. But as for thrones! I thought we called ourselves Liberalists and Redressers? Crowns scarcely hang in the air like roses, as you seem to think, for any passer-by to gather them; but if they do, how do *you* reconcile the desire for one with all your professions of political faith? I suppose, then, like most democrats, you only struggle against tyranny that you may have the right in turn to create yourself Tyrannis?"

His hands closed on a cluster of rhododendrons in the window, and tore them down with an unconscious gesture. In a measure he was wronged; he loved her enough in that moment to have renounced every ambition and every social success for her, and he could not make her even believe that any feeling was in him. In a measure, too, her satire was right, and pierced him the more bitterly because it laid bare so mercilessly all that was confused and unacknowledged to himself. In his pain in her contempt, he hated her almost as much as he loved her, and the old barbaric leaven of jealousy, that he had used to ridicule as the last insanity of fools, broke out despite all self-respect that would have crushed it into silence.

"You are very pitiless, madame!" he said in his teeth. "Do you deal as mockingly with that beggared courier

whom you favor with interviews at an hour you think untimely for lovers less distinguished!"

Her glance swept over him with the grand amazement of one whom no living man ever arraigned. He could not tell whether his insult moved her one whit for sake of the man whom his jealousy seized as his rival; but he saw that it had forever ruined all hope for himself. She looked at him calmly, with a contempt that cut him like a knife.

"I did not know that my wines were so strong or your head so weak. If you transgress the limits of courtesy, I must transgress those of hospitality, and—dismiss you."

He knew that it was as vain to seek to move or sway her from that serene indifference, as to dash himself against the Capri rocks in striving to uproot them; yet in his desperation he lost all the keen and subtle tact, the fine inscrutable ability, that had never failed him save with her. He laid his hands on the sweeping folds of her dress, with the same gesture of entreaty that Erceldoune had used in the unconscious vehemence of his prayer.

"Idalia—stay! Take heed before you refuse my love, for love it *is*, God help me."

She drew the laces from him, and moved away.

"You have as much belief in the name you invoke, monsieur, as I have in the love for which you invoke it! Come! we alike know the world too well for this comedietta not to weary both. You must end it, or I."

"No!—hear me out," he said fiercely, almost savagely, for one whose impassive gentleness had commonly been his choicest mask and weapon. "Think twice before you refuse any toleration to my love. Take *that*, and you shall make me your slave; refuse it, and you will never have had a foe such as you shall find in me. Remember—you cannot brave me lightly, you cannot undo the links that connect us, you cannot wash out my knowledge of all that you have held most secret. Remember whose thoughts and acts and intrigues I have in my keeping. I know what you would give all your loveliness in tribute to me to bribe me from uttering to the world——"

"You try intimidation? I accredited you with better breeding and less melodrama," said Idalia, her careless negligence unruffled, as with a bow like that with which

queens dismiss their courts, she passed from the chamber ere he could follow or arrest her;—it would have been a man bolder and more blinded still than he was who should have dared to do either.

He was left there alone, in the midst of the white warm light and of the burnished leaves swaying against the marble columns; to his lips oaths never came, he was too finely polished, but an imprecation was hurled back upon his heart that cursed her with a terrible bitterness, and a hatred great as was his baffled passion. He hated her for his own folly in bending to the common weakness of men; he hated her for the disdainful truth with which she had penetrated the mixed motives in his heart; he hated her for the shame she had put upon him of offering her a rejected and despised passion; he hated her for all the numberless sorceries of her fascination, of her brilliance, of her pride, which had made him weak as water before their spell. To win her there was nothing he would have checked at; she had become the incarnation of his ambitions, as she might have been the means of their fruition; all that gave her danger to other men but gave her added intoxication for him; she would have been to him, had she but loved him, what the genius and the beauty of she whom they called Hellas Rediviva were to Tallien. And more bitter than pride stung, or vanity pierced, or ambition shattered, was the sense that love her as he had, love her as he would, consume his very heart for her sake as he might, he would never—plead, beseech, swear, or prove it as he should—make her believe that one pulse of love beat in him.

And all the by-gone ironies and contemptuous scoffs which he had used to cast on those who suffered for the lost smile of a woman's eyes came back upon him now, laughing in his ear and jibing at his weakness like fantastic devils mocking at his fall. A woman had enthralled him; and his philosophics were dead—corpses that lay cold and powerless before him, incapable of rallying to his rescue, things of clay without a shadow's value

CHAPTER XV.

THE ALLEGORY OF THE POMEGRANATE.

THE early morning broke on Capri; with the rising of the sun the little fleet of boats all down the shore began to flutter into motion as the birds fluttered into song, the Angelus rang, the full daylight glittered over the white line of towns and villages that nestled far and wide in the bow of the bay, in the transparent air a delicate feathery column of gray smoke curled up from the cone of Vesuvius; the cliffs rose up in the sunlight, vine-covered, and standing like pillars out in the midst of the sea, while the mists were still hanging over that deep blue western depth, stretching out and on to the Mediterranean, farther and farther toward the columns of Hercules and the gates of the African and Asian worlds.

In her own chamber, a morning-room whose windows, clustered round with trained myrtle and clematis, looked out down the shelving cliff on to the sea, Idalia stood; her head was bent, her eyes were grave and filled with thought, and her lips had as much of disdain as of melancholy; she looked a woman to dare much, to reign widely, to submit rarely, to fear never. Yet she was in bondage now.

At a breakfast table, a little distance from her sat Conrad, Count Phaulcon. He was smoking, having finished with the coffee and claret, fruit and fish beside him, and was looking at her under his lashes, a look half wary, half admiring, half angered, half exultant, the look of a man foiled in holding her by intimidation, but successful in holding her by power, yet not wholly at his ease with her, nor wholly so with himself.

"If you would only hear reason," he said, impatiently; he had vanquished her in one sense, but in another she was still his victor, and he was restless under it.

"I am happy to hear reason," she answered coldly, "but of dishonor I am—a little tired!"

There was a certain listless satiric bitterness in the last words.

"Dishonor!" echoed Phaulcon, while the blood flushed over his forehead, and he moved irritably "How strangely you phrase things! What has changed you so? For a woman of the world, a woman of your acumen, of your experience, of your brilliancy!—to pause and draw back for such puerile after-thoughts—I cannot in the least comprehend it. What a scepter you hold! Bah! stronger than any queen's. Queens are mere *fantoccini*—marionettes crowned for a puppet-show, and hung on wires that each minister pulls after his own fancy; but you have a kingdom that is never limited, except at your own choice; an empire that is exhaustless, for when you shall have lost your beauty, you will still keep your power. You smile, and the politician tells you his secret; you woo him, and the velvet churchman unlocks his intrigues; you use your silver eloquence, and you save a cause or free a country. It is supreme power, the power of a woman's loveliness, used as you use it, with a statesman's skill."

She smiled slightly; but the haughty carelessness and resistance of her attitude did not change. Those persuasive, vivacious, hyperbolic words,—she remembered how fatal a magic, how alluring a glamour such as they once had for her; they had no charm now, they had long ceased to have any.

"A supreme power!" pursued Phaulcon. "In the rose-water of your hookahs you steep their minds in what color you will. With the glance of your eyes, you unnerve their wills, and turn them which way you choose. In an opera supper you enchant their allegiance to what roads you like; in the twilight of a boudoir you wind the delicate threads that agitate nations. You are in the heart of conspiracies, in the secrets of cabinets, in the destinies of coalitions, and with Fascination conquer, where reason would fail. It is the widest power in the world; it is that of Antonina, of Marcia, of Olympia, of Pompadour! What can be lacking in such a life?"

"Only what was wanting in theirs—honor!"

The words were spoken very calmly, but there was not the less meaning in them.

"Honor! What makes you all in a moment so in love with that word? There was a time when you saw nothing but what was triumph in your career."

"It is not for *you* to reproach me with that."

Over his changing, handsome, eloquent features a certain flush and shadow came.

"Reproach! I would rather reproach you with the change. And why should there be this continued estrangement between us, Idalia? You loved me once."

Her eyes dwelt on his musingly, very mournfully, with that luster of disdain that was in them, mingled with a momentary wistfulness of recollection.

"Yes, I loved you once," she answered, and her voice had an excessive gentleness in it; but he knew her meaning too well to ask why it was that this was now solely and irrevocably of the past.

He was silent some moments; the dashing and reckless Free Lance felt an embarrassment and a sense of mortification in her presence. He could hold this haughty and exquisite woman in a grip of steel, and feel a savage victory in forcing the proud neck that would not bend, to lie beneath his heel; he could take a refined exultation of cruelty in seeing her pride rebel, her instincts recoil, her dignity suffer mutely; he could amuse himself with all this with a rich pleasure in it. Nevertheless, he owed her many and heavy debts; he gave her an admiration that was tinged still with a strange tyrannous wayward sort of love; he held her in an unwilling homage that made him half afraid of her, and he shrank under the sense of her censure and of her rebuke.

In one sense he was her master, but in another she was far above him, in another she was his ruler, and escaped his power.

He rose restlessly; the glance he gave her was doubtful and embarrassed, and his tone was half appealing, half imperious.

"Well, there is one thing, I want more money."

"You always want money!"

There was a weary scorn in her words, the scorn of a proud woman forced into companionship with what has sunk too utterly in her eyes for any other feeling save that only of an almost compassionate contempt.

Phaulcon laughed; not because he was impervious to the contempt, but because the temper of the man was really lightly and idly insouciant, careless as any butterfly, except in hate.

"Of course! who doesn't? Is there anything money won't buy, from a woman's love to a priest's absolution? Tell me that! A man without money is like a man born into the world without his eyes or his legs; he exists, he doesn't *live;* he hibernates miserably, he never knows what it is to enjoy! Who are the kings of the earth? The Hopes, the Pereires, the Rothschilds, the Barings. War could not be begun, imperial crowns would never come out of pawn, nations would collapse in bankruptcies, thrones would crash down to the dust, and nobles turn crossing-sweepers, without them. Who rule Europe, kings, ministers, cabinets, troops? Faugh! not one whit of it—the CAPITALISTS! Which was the potentate, the great Emperor who owed the bond, or the great Fugger who could afford to put it in the fire? Yes, I do want money. Can you let me have any?"

Her lips moved slightly, she restrained whatever words might rise to them, but she did not repress the disgust that was spoken silently on them.

"You wish to ruin my fortune now?"

"Far from it," laughed Phaulcon. "I am not like the boy who killed his goose of the golden eggs. I would not ruin you on any account; but even if I did, you know very well that any one of your *friends* would willingly make up any breaches I caused in your wealth."

Where she stood, with one hand leaning idly on the carved ivory of a chess-king, she turned with a sudden gesture. He had broken down her haughty silence, her studied contemptuous tranquillity at last. A flush rose over her brow, her lips quivered, not with fear, but with loathing; her eyes flashed fire. All the gentleness that in her moments of abandonment characterized her, and all the languor that at other hours made her so indolently and ironically indifferent, changed into a fearless defiance, the more intense from its force of contrast with the restrained serenity of her past self-control.

"One other word like that and you never enter my pres-

ence again, if to be free from you I close the gates of a convent on my own life. What! are you so vile as *that?* Is all shame lost in you?"

If it were not, there were moments when he was as bad a man as the world held, when the devil in him was alone victorious, and all conscience that had ever lingered was crushed out and forgotten. Her words, and yet far more, her look, lashed all that was evil in his nature to its height.

He laughed aloud.

"'A world of scorn looks beautiful' in you, that I grant, *Eccellenza!* At the same time your title to it is not quite clear. It is for the women who go to Courts to smile with that superb disdain, to answer with that proud defiance—not for the Countess Vassalis!"

There was not much in the words themselves, but in their tones there was an intolerable insolence, an intolerable insult. The fire in her eyes burned deeper still, her breath came rapidly, her whole form was instinct with a passion held in rein, rather for sake of her own dignity than for any more timorous thing. Standing in that haughty wrath, that self-enforced restraint, she looked like some superb stag, some delicate antelope, at bay, and panting to spring on its foes.

"Do you think such taunts as that—*your* taunts! have power to wound me for one instant? Where is your boasted wisdom? It has forsaken you strangely, as strangely as your memory! Whatever I have lost, the loss is due to you; whatever I have erred in, the error lies with you; whatever wreck my life has made, is wrecked through you; whatever taint is on my name, was brought there first by you. You have tried my patience long and often; you have tried it once too much. You have trusted to the tie that is between us; it is broken forever as if it had not been. Insult through you I have continually borne. What the world has said has been as nothing to me, my life is not ruled by it, my honor is not touched by it. But insult from you I will never bear. Be my destroyer as you choose; but your accomplice again you shall never make me—nor your dupe. Stand aside, sir, I will hear no more words."

He had laid his hand upon her arm, she shook him off

with an action as intense in its gesture of contempt as her words had been intense in their concentrated passion, and swept beyond him toward the doorway of her chamber.

Phaulcon sprang before her, and stood between her and the closed doors; there was a taint of cowardice in his nature, and he had forgotten all policy when he had let malice and vengeance hurry him into an open rupture with one who was beyond all others needful to him, and who, whatever her foes, whatever her faults, still never feared.

"Idalia!—wait."

"Let me pass, sir."

"No, by Heaven! not in such a mood."

"You wish to compel me to summon my household?"

"I wish to induce you to hear reason."

"Your euphuistic synonym for some new villainy? I have answered you already."

"Softly, softly! It will not do for *us* to quarrel. You know the terms on which alone you can make such an answer final."

"Your persecution? I am indifferent to it. Allow me to pass."

"Pardon me, no. The terms I meant were—the breaking of your oath."

He spoke very gently, yet at the words she turned pale for the first time in their interview, as though he had pierced her where she was without shield; she did not reply, and he pursued his advantage.

"Tell me,—will your new and eccentric fancy for 'honor' be greatly gratified by the deliberate rupture of your sworn word? When men and women talk much of their honor, to be sure they are always conscious of having lost it, or being just about to lose it with a more flagrant bankruptcy than common; but still, your newly-adopted principle will be ill commenced by the repudiation of your pledged oath, of your bound engagement."

Still she said nothing, only in her eyes suppressed passion gleamed, and her hand clinched as though, but for her dignity's sake, it would have found force to strike him where he stood.

Conrad Phaulcon smiled.

"I am no tyrant, no harsh task-master, my most beauti-

ful Countess, and I frankly admit that I admire you more in your haughty rebellion than I do in the softest smile with which you enchant all our good friends. I exact nothing. I command nothing. I merely remind you—you cannot break from me without also breaking your promise, and more than your promise—your oath. However, a woman's word, I suppose—even when it is sworn, even when it is the word of such a woman as yourself, who have none of your sex's weaknesses—is only given to *be* broken. Is it so?"

She answered nothing still; a slight quick shudder of hatred or of contempt passed over her one moment; she was torn inwardly with such a conflict as the prisoner on parole feels when he might break his fetters away, and strive, at least, for the sweet chance of liberty, were he not held back by one torturing memory—his word.

Suddenly she turned and bent rapidly toward him, her eyes looking into his with so full and brilliant a luster of unuttered scorn, that he started and drew back.

"You sell everything—your body and your soul! What bribe would you take to give me my release?"

"What bribe? None! You are much more to me, my exquisite Idalia, than any gold, well as I love the little god. 'Bribe!' What an ugly word! Bribes are like medicines; every one takes them, but no one talks about them. Your 'release,' too! when you live as free as air!"

She said no more, but stood aloof from him again in haughty and enforced composure.

"Leave my presence, or let me pass out," she said, briefly. "One or the other."

"Either, with pleasure, if you will give me two answers. First, will you break your oath?"

The look that gave so much of heroism and of grandeur to her beauty passed across it; to stoop to supplication to him would have been as utterly impossible to her as to have put down her neck beneath his heel, and though she could not break his bonds, she was not vanquished by him. She answered with a calm endurance that obeyed, not him, but the law of her own nature:

"No."

"Ah, that is well and wise, *ma belle*. Now for the other question. You will give me the money?"

"No."

The reply was precisely the same as it had been before: the triumph in his eyes fell.

"And why not?"

"Because every sum I gave you now would seem given because I feared you. Fall as low as that, you know well enough that I shall never do. As far as you hold me by my oath, so far I will hold myself bound, no farther; for the rest I have said—all is canceled henceforward between us."

"What? Do you mean that you deny my title to my power on you? Do you mean that it can ever be possible for your mere will to cancel such a tie as there is between us? Do you mean that, if you pretend to forget the past and all my claims on you, I shall ever allow them to be forgotten?"

"'Forgotten?' No. It is not so easy to forget. But trade on them longer, I have said, you shall never do. I have endured your exactions too many years already."

"But, by Heaven! then I insist——"

"You cannot insist. If you need money, you know the price of it: my release from you, as far as you have the power to bestow it. On other terms, you will never again live on my gold. The choice will be for you."

"But I demand——"

"You can demand nothing, sir."

And with a movement that even now did not stoop to be hurried, or lose in any sort its dignity, she swept by him before he could arrest her, passed through the door, and closed it.

He knew Idalia well enough to know that to force himself on her, or seek to intimidate her into compliance with his will, would be as utterly vain as to seek to quarry with a razor the great black heights of Tiberio towering yonder in the light. Half the victory was in his hands, half in hers. To gain the rest, he knew that he must wait.

He left her, and went out across the gardens and down the winding way that led along the rocks to the shore. He was not wholly satisfied with his morning's work; he felt the mute resistance of a proud nature against a power of which he was tyrannously and inexorably jealous, and

he knew that this power did not extend over her money, of which he had often received much, of which he was always wanting to receive more. Besides, with all his evil triumph in galling and goading her to his uttermost ingenuity, a certain shame was always on him before Idalia, and a certain love for her always survived in his heart; love that was always strangely blent with something of unwilling homage, of reluctant awe, and, now and then, of absolute repentance.

He would not have undone one of the links of the fetters he had made her wear under the purple-hemmed and gold-broidered robes of her beauty, freedom, and supremacy; but at the same time, in her presence or freshly from it, he felt ashamed of having forged them. Long habit had killed almost everything in him that had once been a little better; but Conrad Phaulcon had still here and there certain flashes of conscience left.

As he went toward the beach, round a sharp point of rock abruptly jutting out with its hanging screen of ivy and myrtle, ere he looked where he went, his foot was almost against the arm of a man lying there, in the shadow, asleep.

Erceldoune lay on the grass, the horse standing motionless beside him; his limbs were stretched out in all their careless magnificence of strength, his head had fallen slightly back, his chest rose and fell with the calm breathings of a deep repose, and as the morning light slanted through a fissure of the cliffs it was full upon his face, from which in repose the dauntless light, the eagle fire, had gone, and only had left now a profound and serene melancholy.

It was yet early; sleep had only come to him as the sun had risen, after hours of intense excitement, and a night of extreme bodily fatigue. There was nothing to awaken him here, and lulled by the pleasant murmur of the seas and the warmth of the young day, he dreamt on still. The Greek started violently, and a fierce panther-like longing was the first thing that seized him, mingled with supreme amazement; a ferocious vindictiveness darkened and flushed the glory of his face; he paused, his lips a little parted, his teeth ground, his whole form quivering with the long-

ing to spring; his temperament was intensely vivacious, and years had done nothing to chill if they had done much to harden him, and little by little he had so gathered up his hatred toward the man he had injured, that it was as great as though that injury had been received, instead of given, by him.

He stooped over the sleeper, noting the unarmed powerlessness of that slumber, while his teeth clinched, his glance wandered by sheer instinct toward a loose, weighty, mallet-like mass of granite lying near him. One blow from it in a sure hand, and the life would be still before it could waken for a struggle, a shout, a sigh.

"I might crush out his brains as easily as a fly, and, by *God*, I could do it, too!" he thought, in a fierce blindness of hatred that remembered only that night ride through the pomegranates, and forgot all the vileness of his own brutality toward this man who lay sleeping at his feet.

Without waking, Erceldoune stirred slightly, his right hand that lay open, clinched; he turned with a restless sigh—he was dreaming of Idalia still. At the movement his foe cowered, and drew back involuntarily; pusillanimity ran in his blood, and he had a keen dread of this "Border Eagle," who had been invulnerable under so many shots, and had had a resurrection almost from the grave; a dread nearly as strong as his hate for him. Moreover, with that action he remembered many things, policy before all, which forbade him to attempt any risk of reckoning with the man he had left for dead in the Carpathians. He took one long glance at him—the glance of hatred is as lingering as that of love, and of still surer recollection—then hastily and noiselessly turned aside over the thick grasses, and went his way down to the beach.

It was not through any sense of shame or of humanity that he left the sleeping man unharmed, it was not even that he would have shrank from crushing the life out of him as mercilessly as out of a cicada; it was only that he remembered the danger and unwisdom of such self-indulgence, and also, in some faint emotion, he felt a sense that Idalia was near them both—too near for him to sink into such crime as this. In his own way he loved her, in his own way revered her, though he cared nothing how he

tortured, almost as little how he ruined her. While under her influence he could not be his worst.

An hour later he had crossed the bay, and approached a *palazetto* smothered in orange-trees, whose terraces overhung the sea, odorous, and shaded deep with myrtle. He made his way unannounced, and passing through several chambers entered one in which he found the temporary owner of the house, who looked up wearily and listlessly—the owner was Victor Vane.

"Well," he asked, as the door closed.

"That Scot! That courier!" panted Phaulcon, "he is in Capri. I passed him lying asleep on the grass; I could have killed him like a dog. Does he know Idalia? Is it possible he can have learnt that it was she who saved him?"

"Know Idalia? Yes, beyond doubt, he knows her."

"He does? She never named him to me!"

"Very possibly; but you remember how she saved him, and Miladi has her caprices!—she had him with her day after day in the East."

The words were languid still; there was no irritation expressed in them, but there was a significance for which, had Erceldoune been there, the speaker would have been hurled out on to his terrace with as little ceremony as though he had been dead Border grouse.

Even his comrade and sworn ally darted a look on him savage, passionate, but withal that *better* than any look he had given, for a hot and frank wrath was in it, with something of generous challenge.

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean what I say—no more. This gentleman—your Carpathian friend—found her out while he was chasing what he very absurdly calls his 'assassin' down the Bosphorus shore; he dined with her when we were there, and the Countess appeared to take a very flattering interest in the landless laird. He is a handsome giant, you know, and I have often noticed that your women of intellect have a wonderful eye for physical perfections!"

With every quiet word he plunged a stab of steel into his listener's heart, with every one he veiled more closely the passions that were moving in his own. The color

changed in Phaulcon's face, he writhed under every syllable, but he could resist none; the same merciless tyranny as he had exercised over Idalia was used over him now, and he had not the fearless and haughty strength which was in hers that could have enabled him to defy or to disdain it.

"In the East—in the East?" he muttered. "With *her?*—and she never told me!"

"*Caro!* Did you imagine you had your fair Countess's confidence? I can assure you you are excessively mistaken."

Phaulcon shook in all his limbs with restrained passion. Well as he knew the art of word-torturing, he was scarce so perfect an adept in it as his friend.

"Do you mean——" he began impetuously, and paused.

Vane laughed, rose, and sauntered a little way from the table.

"Have you breakfasted? Do I mean what? Just taste one of these citrons; they are the first ripe this season. Do I mean that your friend, the Border Chief, has lost his head after the Countess Vassalis? Yes, I do mean it. He is wildly in love with her, and he has eyes that say so remarkably well, considering that he had loved nothing but tiger-shooting and hard riding till that charming piece of romance in the Carpathians."

The words were easy, indifferent, a little flippant and contemptuous; they stung the Greek like so many scorpions. He flung himself out of his seat, and paced to and fro the apartment with fierce breathless oaths ground out on his lips. Vane looked at him with an admirable affectation of amused astonishment.

"*Pace, pace, caro!*" he said, softly. "Why *will* you always be so impetuous? Vesuvius yonder, who looks rather dangerous to-day by-the-by, was never more impulsive! What annoys you so much in this colossal courier being in love with Miladi Idalia? He is not the first by many a score!"

Conrad Phaulcon swung round and strode up to his tormentor.

"By Heaven, if you taunt me, or scoff at her with that——"

"Gently, gently, très cher! *We* do not quarrel. Besides, there is really no object in assuming all that with me. Just recollect how long I have known you—and how well!"

Phaulcon was silenced, and lashed into obedience: his head dropped; he turned again, and paced the chamber with fast uneven steps.

"This idea annoys you," pursued his counselor, leisurely. "I grant his presence is troublesome, awkward indeed for you; and Scotch patience with Spanish fire is a disagreeable combination. Besides, your own excessive impetuosity made that little affair very notorious; if he were to recognize you, I fear, do what you would, something extremely unpleasant would result. Still, with due caution this might not happen, and no danger need occur from it if Idalia do not betray you, and that she probably will not do, unless—unless——" Victor paused a moment, and let his eyes drop on his companion. "He is a magnificent man to look at, and adores her in all good faith, which might have the charm of novelty," he added, in a musing whisper.

"Damnation! I would lay her dead at my feet if I thought——"

Vane raised his hand in deprecation.

"Pray do not be so very excessive! That language was all very well in the middle ages; both you and Sir Fulke Erceldoune have dropped in on us by mistake, out of the Crusades. But your brilliant Idalia is not a woman to be murdered. In the first place, she is too beautiful; in the second, she is too notorious; in the third, a glance of her eyes would send any assassin back again unnerved and unstrung. No; you must neither kill him, nor kill her. The idea! What barbarism, and what blundering. It is only—excuse me—madmen who use force; is it not their own necks that pay the penalty?"

"But do you mean that she has any sort of feeling for this accursed Scot?"

The other smiled.

"Dear friend, is it for me to say what new caprice your fair Countess's will may indulge in? Certainly, if one

might attribute such a provinciality to the most accomplished woman of her time, I should have said, by the little I saw in Constantinople, that she did feel some sort of tenderness to your Titan of an enemy. At least, she made him win at baccarat, bade me harm him 'at my peril,' and spent the hours alone with him in a very poetic manner. Though really I cannot imagine why she should smile on a penniless Queen's Messenger, except by the feminine rule of contradiction!"

Lashing him like the separate cords of a scourge, each word fell on his listener's ear. Vane watched his fury with gratified amusement; this thing had been bitter beyond all conception to him, lightly and idly as he purposely spoke of it, and it rejoiced him with a compensating satisfaction to turn its bitterness elsewhere. Furious oaths in half the tongues of Europe chased themselves one after another off the Greek's lips. Vane let this galled and futile passion spend itself in its vain wrath some moments, then he spoke again:

"The idea annoys you? Well, certainly he is an inconvenient person to be on the list of her lovers. But what can you do? As for shooting him, or doing anything of the kind, that would create a fracas, it is not to be thought of. If you let him see you, all he will do will be to knock you down, and give you into arrest. Besides this, Idalia is in a great measure independent of you; over her wealth you have no legal control, and all moral claim to coerce her you have yourself forfeited. True, you have a hold on her by many things; but that hold could not prevent this *beau seigneur* of the barren moors from being her lover, if she choose to break her vows for him, especially if she be quite frank with him, and let him know all. Really, on my honor, placed as you are through that terrible impulsiveness which you never will abandon, I do not see how you are to step between Madame de Vassalis and this modern Bothwell, if they choose to play at Love for a little while with each other."

And Vane softly finished his citron, having spoken the most stinging words he could have strung together with the gentle, persuasive accent of a woman coaxing her best friend. Phaulcon swung round and strode up to him as

he had done before, his eyes glittering with fire, his fac darkly flushed.

"Perdition seize you! if you dare to make a jest of——"

"*Chut!*" said Vane, with the suavest hush that ever fell from any lips. "Caro mio, if I speak a little lightly of your lovely Idalia, whose fault is it?—'is it not thine, O my friend?' *Altro!* keep that style for men who have not worn the badge of silver ivy with you at an opera ball. As regards this affair—he is certainly in love with her; she possibly encourages it. Unlikely, I know, but still—I repeat—possible. He is an excessively fine man! Therefore, since you cannot appear in the matter, owing to various little intricacies, what steps will you take? It is a delicate question, cher Conrad; the Countess Idalia is not a woman to brook open interference:—even with your title to give it. She is very proud! I am wholly with you, and I am not inclined to be very *simpatico* to that Arab-looking courier; but you must really be cautious how you touch him; that matter would look very ugly if it turned up against you. The idea of firing at him at all!—and then of not hitting him when you did fire! Will you not believe me how *very* mistaken all impulsiveness is?"

Phaulcon writhed under the negligent, gently-uttered phrases; all the pent passion in him was tenfold hotter and darker, because it was in so great a measure powerless; but he was blinded to all that Victor chose him to be blind to—namely, his own love for her of whom they spoke—and he dreamed of nothing in his words beyond their mutual antagonism for the man they had mutually injured. An hour went by before they parted; left alone, the master of the dainty *palazetto* overhanging the Neapolitan waves neither peeled a citron, nor toyed lightly with this thought of Erceldoune's presence in Capri. On the contrary, admirably though he had veiled them, passions fiercer than the Greek's had lightened in him with the intelligence: the delicate colorlessness of his face flushed with a faint hot hue, his blue smiling eyes gleamed like steel, he set his teeth with a snarl like a greyhound's.

"She loves him, or she will love him;—how soft her eyes grew for him in the East! There is no assassinating him—only fools kill. There is no challenging him—that

is long out of date, and, besides, he is as good a shot as any of us, or better. There is no ruining him—his fortunes are ruined already, and she is too world-wise to attempt any lies to her with a chance of success. If she choose to allow his love, who can prevent that?—Conrad cannot exert his title while the Moldavian affair hangs over his head. There is only one chance;—if he be such a fool as to take his passion seriously, if he be ignorant of her history, and give her headlong faith. But that is such a hazard!—he is in love with her beauty, what would he care though one proved to him that she were vile as Messalina? Ah, Idalia! *bellissima* Idalia! you are haughty as a queen, and beautiful as a goddess, and dangerous as a velvet-voiced cardinal, and brightly keen as the wisest statesman, but——"

And while these thoughts strayed through his mind, he thrust the knife he held up to its haft in a pomegranate among the citrons; and while the red juice welled out, and the purple pulp seemed to shrink as though wounded, he plunged the blade, down and down, again and again, into the heart of the fruit, as though the action were a relief to him, as though the stab to the pomegranate were an allegory.

Yet with it a nobler feeling, a melancholy that was for the moment too deep to be able to replace regret by retaliation, came on him.

"She could have made me what she would!" he thought. "I could have won a throne for *her*. Greece swings in the air for any bold hand to seize; a turn of the wheel, and Hungary may be thrown in the lottery; free Venetia, and she would give the scepter to her deliverer. Such things have been; they will be again. Valerian was a common soldier, Themistocles was a bastard, Bonaparte an artillery officer—what has been may be again. They were once far farther off power than I. For myself, I could do all that is possible—with her, I would do the *impossible!*"

A smile crossed his face at the dreaming wildness of his own thoughts; his profound acumen could never so wholly desert him that he could be the prey to any emotion without some sense of ridicule and disdain even for himself; but there was more of pain at his heart than of self-contempt; he felt, even amid the jealous bitterness that was

turning his love into hatred, that he should have become a better and a truer man had Idalia returned his passion.

"I dream like a boy, or a madman!" he thought, while his hand crushed with a fierce gesture an odorous crown of orange-flowers, and flung the bruised petals out to the sea. "And yet,—with her,—I could have had force in me to make even such dreams real. If she had loved me, I would have slaved for her, dared for her, conquered for her. If she had loved me, there is nothing I would not have compassed."

Even where he stood in solitude, his lips quivered and his forehead contracted, as under some unbearable physical pain; hardly thirty years were over his head, all the maturity of life lay before him; he felt that he had the genius in him to rule men and to carve himself a memory in history; he had the ability that would have made him a supreme and triumphant statesman; he would have been this, he would not have failed to be it, had opportunity been his. As it was, he saw the portals of fame closed to him through the disadvantages of position, and the exercise of power denied to him because he had not the primary power of money. Impatient and bitter at his exile from legitimate fields he had thrown himself into bastard politics; and adventured his fate with the secret and uncertain gambling of intrigue and conspiracy.

He hated Austria, and would have schemed night and day to humble her; beyond this feeling he had as little unison as might be with his associates; for the grandeur of theoretic republicanism, for the regeneration of Italy, for the freedom of Hungary or Poland, for the advance of the high-flown quixotism of Garibaldians, or for such poetic partisanship as breathed in "Casa Guidi Windows," he had never a single throb of sympathy. But he loved the power that it seemed to him he might obtain through them; he loved the machinations that in their work he wove so wisely and so well; he foresaw what had not then come, the certain downfall of the Neapolitan Bourbons; he had the spirit of the gamester, and was happiest in the recklessness of chance; he had the ambition of a statesman, and he aspired, in the revival of nationalities and in the turmoil of new liberties, to seize the moment to advance

himself to the prominence and the predominance which he coveted. Therefore he had embraced a party with which his temper had little akin, whose views his own mind disdained as chimerical, and whose cause only his thwarted ambitions induced him to embrace. As yet, though he held a great power in his hands over the lives of men whose projects and whose aspirations were all confided to his mercy, no substantial power had accrued to him; he had reaped but little, he had risked much, and his accumulated debts were very heavy. As he saw himself now,—although in general, when in the full excitement of his life, the full complexity of its intrigues, he thought otherwise,—he saw the truth: that in the flower of his manhood he was without a career, without a future; that with all his talents, graces, and fashion, he was no more than an adventurer; that bankruptcy, pecuniary and social, might any hour fall on him; that—stripped of the brilliance of his elegant world, and of the euphuisms of a political profession—he was neither more nor less in literal fact than a gamester, a spy, and a beggared speculator in the great hazards of European destinies. In such a mood he hated himself, he hated all he was allied with, he hated the world that he had the genius and the tact to rule, yet in which he absolutely owned not even a sum enough to save him from hopeless ruin whenever the fate that hung over him should fall. And a greater bitterness than even this came on him: for once he loved; for once he felt that greater, better, truer things might have been possible for him; for once a pang, almost as sharp as agony, seized him in dreaming of what he might have been.

For once he suffered.

Every disdainful word, every contemptuous glance, every cold rebuke, of the woman he coveted with the passion of ambition, as well as with the passion of love, seemed burned into his memory and perpetually before him. He could not even make her believe that he loved her!—that was the deadliest pang of all. Hate, cruel, fierce, remorseless, the most insatiate hate of all, the hate which springs from baffled love, wound its way into his thoughts again. Before now, he had been a cold tactician, an unscrupulous intriguer, a man who cared nothing at what cost his ends

were gained, but still one who, from innate gentleness of temper and instinctive refinement of nature, had felt no sort of temptation toward grosser and darker evil; had, indeed, ridiculed it as the clumsy weapon of the ignorant and the fool; now he was in that mood when the heart of the man possessed by it cries thirstily, "Evil, be thou my good."

"I have all their cards in my hands," he thought, where he leaned, musingly flinging the buds of the gum-cistus into the water below. "A word from me—and her haughty head would lie on the stone floor of a dungeon."

The thought grew on him, strangely changing the character of his features as it worked out its serpent's undulations through his mind. His clear and sunny eyes grew cruel; his delicate lips hardened into a straight acrid line; his smooth brow darkened and contracted; this man, who had had before but the subtle, graceful swoop, the bright, unerring keenness of the falcon, now stooped lower, and had the merciless craft, the lust to devour and to destroy, of the fox.

He drew out of his pocket a letter in a miniature Italian hand; such a hand as a Machiavelli, a John de Medici, or an Acquaviva, might have written. He read it slowly, weighing every line, then put it back into its resting-place, with a certain disdain and sneer upon his face:—there was not the brain in Europe, he thought, that could outwit his.

"Austria will bid higher than that," he mused, "and the young wretch here will fall as Bourbons always fell. Six months, and he will be driven out of Naples—it would be much to be his 'Count d'Avalto' and his 'Lord Chamberlain' *then!* Fools! do they think such a bribe as that would take? If *I* make terms, it shall be with the Hapsburgh; they shall pay me in proportion to my hate. They know what my enmity has meant!"

He leaned musingly over the marble parapet of his terrace, the lines of cruelty and of craft sinking deeper into his fair, unworn face; even to him, free from all such weaknesses as an unprofitable honor, and not unwilling to sell his hate, as he would have sold his intellect for power, even to him there was something bitter and shameful in the thought of treason—something that made him recoil from

the desertion of those who had been allied to him so long, and acceptance of those who had so long had his deepest hatred; something that made the very silence of the Italian noon, the very melody of the Italian seas, the very cadence of a boat-song, that echoed dreamily over the waves from a distance, that only let its closing cadence, "Libertà! O Libertà!" come upon his ear, seem like a reproach to him by whom she—this Italy in chains, this Italy ruined through her own fatal dower of a too great beauty—was about to be betrayed.

There never yet was the man so hardened that he could play the part, and take the wage of an Iscariot, without this pang.

"She does it," he said, in his teeth, with a sophism that ere now he would have disdained. "She might have made me what she would; she chooses to make me——"

"A traitor," was not uttered even clearly in his thoughts; who thinks out clearly such thoughts as these to the last iota of their own damnable meaning? A shiver, too, ran through him as he recalled a risk that even his fertile statecraft could not avail to ward off from him, the step he meditated once being taken;—the risk of the stab-thrust in the back from the poinard of the "Brotherhood," which even in this day, even in the streets of polished European capitals, strikes soon or late, howsoever high they stand in a traitor's guilty purples, those who have broken the oath of those secret bonds.

Then he laughed; a smile in which the last instinct of his better nature died.

"Faugh! my good Italians shall believe that I join the White Coats to serve Venetia: my blind Viennese shall think I wear a fair face to Italy to entrap her confidence for them. It is so easy to dupe both. And *she*—Naples will suffice for that. A whisper of mine to Monsignore Giulio, and scorn, and wit, and statesmanship, and wealth, and all the cozenries of her loveliness, all the resources of her art, will avail her nothing. There, in the Vicaria, what will she do with her beauty, and her kingdom, and her lovers, and the insolence of her pride, *then?* Better have shared a crown with me!"

As his thoughts shaped themselves into ruthless shape

that dulled remorse, and stole swiftly and surely on the evil path which tempted him, the whole man in him changed: the gentleness of his nature grew into fierce lust, the unscrupulous subtlety of his intellect was merged into a deadly thirst for retaliation. On the woman who had scornfully repelled him he could have dealt a hundred deaths.

Yet for one moment more the love he had borne her vanquished him again, and he remembered nothing but its pain, its wrong, and its rejection; for one moment more he gave himself up to the misery, the weakness, the shame, as he held it, of this fool's idolatry;—it was the one thing alone, loathingly as he contemned it, that could have made him a better and a truer man.

His head dropped till it sank down on to his arms, that were folded on the marble ledge, and a sharp quiver like a woman's weeping shook him from head to foot.

"I would have forgiven her all—even her scorn," he thought, "if only she would have *believed* that I loved her!"

CHAPTER XVI.

"MONSIGNORE."

In one of the fairest nooks of the Bay of Naples stood a palace in the perfection of taste, from the frescoes on its walls within to the delicate harebell-like campanile, that threw its slim shaft aloft, looking toward Amalfi. Fronting the sea, a small oval-shaped pier ran out into the water, with a broad flight of steps terminating it; above this, the natural growth of the country had hung a self-woven screen of orange and myrtle boughs; a place of embarkation, or disembarkation, lonely, secure, and unlooked on by anything save by lofty Anacapri far above, hanging like an eagle's nest among the clouds. In the shadow of the evening a boat stopped there, a man alighted, dismissed the rowers, and went on along the length of the little quay to

an arched door of curious cinque-cento work; it was the private entrance of the *palazetto*, which, despite the humility of the diminutive it was given, stretched up and around in wing on wing in stately architecture, and numbered ninety chambers.

He was admitted, and entered the house, lighted with a flood of light, crowded with a glittering suite of attendants of all grades, and seemingly endless in its vastness with chamber and corridor, opening out one on another in wearying succession of splendor, relieved from monotony, however, by the exquisite pieces of sculpture and of painting that studded the whole like a second Pitti. Some thirty of these corridors and reception-rooms ended in a little chamber, small at least by comparison, hung with purple velvet, its furniture of silver and of ebony, its only painting a superb Ecce Homo of Leonardo's, its windows narrow and lancet-shaped, the whole now illumined with a soft amber light;—this was the sanctuary of Monsignore Villaflor.

Monsignore rose with affability—he was ever affable—and advanced with courtly grace. Monsignore was a handsome and portly man, with the beautiful Neapolitan eyes and the beautiful Neapolitan face; a little losing the symmetry of his figure now, and over his fiftieth year, but a very noble person still. He wore the violet robes of a bishop, and on his hand sparkled the bishop's amethyst ring. Looking at him, it was hard to believe that the race of prince-bishops had died out, for he was a very princely person. He was not like St. Philip Neri, he was not like Reginald de la Pole, he was not like Acacius, or François Xavier, or the great martyred man who looked across to England with those sublime words—"Terram Anglicæ video, et favente Domino terram intrabo, sciens tamen certissimè quod mihi immineat passio"—and kept his oath, and went. Monsignore was not like any of these; but he was excessively like Cardinal Bembo, he was excessively like Cardinal Mazarin.

Victor Vane bowed before him with the grace of a courtier and the reverence of a son of the Church; with the Paris literati he was a Cartesian, with the Germans a Spinozian, with the English men of science a Rationalist,

a Pantheist, a Monotheist, or a Darwinian, with the Mountain an Atheist, as best suited; but with the Monsignori he was always deferential to the Faith. They met as those who have often met for the advancement of mutual aims, but they met also as those who have to play a delicate game with each other, in which the cards must be studiously concealed. Both were perfect diplomatists. The game opened gracefully, courteously, cautiously, with a little trifling on either side; but they approached their respective points in it more quickly, less warily, than usual, for he who before had but played into the hands of Monsignore to betray him, now came to play into his hands with sincerity.

This was not the first by many audiences the brilliant Bishop, the favorite of the Vatican, had given to one who had been until the night before this the deadliest foe of his Church, of his king, of his projects, of his policies; for Giulio Villaflor had been duped despite all his finesses, and had believed the gentle and adroit Englishman his tool, while he was, in truth, the tool himself. Monsignore had his silken webs over Italy, and France, and Austria, and Spain; Monsignore had his secret *sbirri* of the ablest; Monsignore knew everything; was the lover of great ladies who played the spy in palaces, never gave a Benedicite without some diplomatic touch, never administered the Viaticum but what the Church was the richer for a legacy, never yet was compromised by a lie, yet never yet was driven to the vulgarity of the truth;—but even Monsignore had been trepanned by Victor Vane. The secret of the defeat was this: Giulio Villaflor loved power well, but he loved other things as well; the pleasures of the table, the scent of pure wines, and the gleam of almond eyes and snowy bosoms. His opponent had loved nothing but power; until now, for the first time, he loved a woman and loved a revenge. Hence, now for the first time, also, he played into Villaflor's hands.

A dusky red tinged the pale clear brown cheek of the Bishop, and in his eyes was the gleam that those who knew him had learned to tremble sorely at when too few were found for the dungeons of the Vicaria, or out of the crowds of Easter-day one face dared look a frank defiance at him while the Silver Trumpets sounded.

"All the revolutionists have not menaced us and braved us as this one woman has done!" he muttered. "All the rebels of Sardinia and Sicily have not the danger in them that Idalia has. The man is bad enough, but she——"

"Conrad can be bought," put in Vane, gently; there was, indeed, an overstrained quietude in his face and in his tone. "Name the price your Grace will give; I will purchase him for you to-morrow."

Monsignore bent his head with a slight smile.

"Promise what you will, I can confide perfectly in your discretion!" he said, with his suave dignity of grace; he reserved to himself the right to refuse ratification of the promises when the fish should be fairly baited and hooked. "*He* is but a secondary matter—can *she* be bought?"

"No!" Into the calm immutability of her betrayer's voice there glided a half sullen, half bitter, yet withal admiring savageness; he was recalling to memory the imperial disdain with which she had swept from him the night before, the indifference with which she had disregarded alike his entreaties and his threats. "What could be offered her that could eclipse what she has? She has wealth—she has dominion—she has a power wider than yours!"

The last words were almost bluntly uttered; for the moment he felt a thrill of triumph in flinging the splendor and the influence of the woman by whom he had been rejected in the teeth of even the purples and the pomps of Eternal Rome.

The dusky red glowed slightly brighter in Monsignore's cheek, a flush of anger; he waved his delicate white hand with an expressive action.

"While they last! But if she had choice between retaining these—under *our* pleasure—and losing them—say in the casemates of the Capuano yonder; what then, my son? She would yield?"

"She would never yield."

He answered calmly, still with that restrained and impassive serenity on him; by the tone, he said as though he had spoken it that no menace, no pang, no death, would make Idalia what he was now—a renegade.

"*Altro!* she is a woman?" said Monsignore, with the

mockery of the Neapolitan laugh in the protrusion of his handsome under lip.

"We waste words, Monsignore," said Victor Vane, abruptly. "She is not like other women."

"Contumacious! Then she must feel the arm of the Church." The words were spoken without any ruffle of that silken and unctuous tone in which Giulio Villaflor whispered softest trifles in the ear of Austrian and Parisian beauty, but in the lustrous eyes gleamed a glance cold as ice, fierce as lust, dangerous as steel. "My son, tell us all that you know once more."

"All that I know!" There was a smile that flickered across his features one moment, though it passed too instantaneously for it to be even caught by Villaflor. "That would take hours. I can give you heads, and bring you proofs as you require them. I know that she arranged the escape of the two Ronaldeschi from the galleys. I know that she has effected the flight of Carradino from his prison; I know that through her twenty thousand muskets will find their way to Poland, and the same into Tuscany, by routes that all your *sbirri* will never discover; I know that it was at her salons in Paris that the war of Sicily was first organized; I know that she is the life, the soul, the core, the prophetess of every national movement. I know that she holds the threads of every insurrectionary movement from the Apennines to the Caucasus——"

Monsignore made a slight gesture of impatience; while shading his eyes with the hand on which the episcopal amethyst glittered, he narrowly watched the immutable countenance of his companion.

"We know all these, and much more," he said, with an accent of disappointed irritation. "If we can once secure her person, we have witness enough against her to consign her twenty times over to the *peine forte et dure*, to the prison, or the convent cell, for her lifetime. Idalia!—she is Satanas!—you have more to tell than these stories, *figlio mio?*"

"Or I would not have wearied your Grace to-night," assented Vane, still with that calm and undeviating air as of one who, having learnt a recitation by heart, mechani-

cally, yet unwaveringly, repeats it out. "Yes, I know more; I know that she is—here."

"*Here!*"

Despite the perfect self-command and the trained immovability of the courtly Churchman, surprise and exultation for once escaped him, uncontrolled and unconcealed; his eyes lightened, his hand grasped the ivory and ebon elbow of his state chair, his lips moved rapidly.

"Here! She has the daring of a Cæsar!"

And there was in the words an accent of compelled admiration that was, perhaps, from such a foe as this great Priest of Rome, the highest homage that Idalia had ever yet extorted; for it was homage wrung out in unwilling veneration from the hatred and the cunning of an implacable antagonist.

Vane started, as though stung, and turned his face toward the grand dark canvas of the Ecce Homo, away from the fall of the light. When the astute Churchman, who had been his own hated enemy and duped tool so long, and whom he now used as the weapon of his vengeance—when the haughty Catholic, who pursued her with the rancor of his creed, and with the unpardoning bitterness of a mighty and unscrupulous priesthood against those who dare to defy and to disdain it—when, from the unwilling admiration of Giulio Villaflor, this tribute was wrung to the lofty and unconquerable courage of the woman whom he had come hither to betray into the unsparing hands of her foes, he—the traitor—felt for one moment sunk into depths of shame, felt for one moment the full depravity and vileness of that abyss into which thwarted ambition and covetous revenge had drawn him.

Yet if he would have repented and retracted, he could not; and would not have done so if he could. The word was spoken; he had delivered her over into the power of her adversaries, had delivered over her beautiful neck to the brand, her proud head to the cord, her wealth to the coffers of the Bourbon, her loveliness to the mercy of Rome, her life to the hell of the Dungeon. It was done; and still as he turned to the dark shadow of the Leonardo with that loathing of the light which murderers feel when every ray that touches them seems to them as though

seeking out their crime, he would not have undone it if he could. For he had loved her, and now hated her with a great insatiate hate; so near these passions lie together.

"Here!" echoed Villaflor once more, while his large eyes lighted with the fire of the tiger, though that fire was subdued under the droop of his velvet lashes. "In Naples! And I not to know it?"

In that single sentence was told a terrible reckoning that waited for those of his people—of his spies—who had been thus treacherous, or for the carelessness which had withheld from him the near presence of the woman whom he had watched, waited, plotted, bribed, schemed to entrap with all the intricacies and resources of his astute intellect and far-spread meshes, for so long.

"In Capri—and without disguise," answered Vane, turning his head from a seemingly negligent glance at the Leonardo; his eyes were quite clear, his countenance quite frank, his smile gentle and delicately satirical as usual. He was now attuned to his part again, and the evil in him gaining the sole mastery upon him, made him take a Borgian pleasure in thus preparing drop on drop, with the precision and the genius of science, the poison that was to consume and wither the brilliant life of the woman he had vainly loved. "Remember! first, she is unaware that you know all your Grace could alone have known through me—she is unaware that there are any proofs against her in the possession of the Neapolitan Court; secondly, she is one to whom the meaning of fear and submission is unknown; she claims the Greek blood of Artemesia—she has Artemesian daring; thirdly, she has so attached the Marinari to her, that, good subjects and brainless beasts though these Capriotes be, she could scarce be touched on their shore with impunity; fourthly and chiefly, so many swords would leap out of their scabbards for Idalia, despite the many dead men who have, dying, cursed her, so world-wide and so well known is the dominion of her beauty, that I believe she thinks that none of the governments dare touch her. She relies on this: that Sicily is in revolt, Naples in ferment; one public act, such as these poor, blind, contumacious mules call tyranny, done to a woman whose loveliness could excite

the populace, and whose genius could command it like Idalia's, and the crisis which is, as even you confess, often so near, might come, despite you and the Palace, with a thunder you could not still by the thunder of the Vatican, Holy Father."

There was a bitter irony hidden under the gentle courtliness of the words, and of the apologetic softness of the smile with which they were uttered. He had been a foe and a traitor to Giulio Villaflor so long, that he could not at once abandon the refined pleasure of thrusting silken taunts against that silken Churchman. The words lashed the passions of the Neapolitan as was purposed; that dusky scarlet glow came again into his cheek, his nostrils dilated, his fine lips quivered haughtily; for the instant he lost the unctuousness of the Palace Priest, and had the grand arrogance of a Wolsey, a Richelieu, or a Granvella.

He moved as though to rise from his ivory chair—as though to go into the van of combat for the Church and for the Nobles, like the warrior bishops of the past.

"Do you think I fear the people!—a beast that crouches to the whip, and kicks the fallen; that cringes when its paunch is empty, and bullies when it is bold with a full feed! *I* fear the people! By the Mother of God, I would teach them such obedience that they should never breathe, but by my will!"

For the moment there flashed out the old spirit of the Colonna and the Este in the unusual outbreak of proud passion; arrogant, cruel, and iron though the words were, Giulio Villaflor, as he spoke them, was a grander and a better man, because a truer and a bolder, than in the velvet sweetness, the courtly maskings of his palatial sanctities, of his episcopal voluptuousness, of his blending of courtier, statesman, saint, and roué. He who heard smiled that delicate smile that meant a malice and an irony so infinite, yet never betrayed this unless it were desired to be betrayed.

"Then," he asked, softly, "you would dare arrest her in Capri?"

The eyes of Monsignore flashed upon him.

"*Dare* is not a word to use to Rome!"

It was the haughty defiance and self deification of the

Pontifical Power roused, as it had roused of old against Emperors and Kings, rebels in the Cloisters and rebels in the Courts, against the scepter of Barbarossa as against the science of Abélard, of the Power which refuses to see that this day is not as that, which denies that the dawn has shone because its fiat has gone forth for darkness to endure.

"Your Grace cannot think that I used the word save as suggestive of what is expedient. Your object is to make the Countess Vassalis a political prisoner. Is it advisable to allow her the halo of political martyrdom? Do you wish to give the enemies of the Church and King the power to compare you to a second Cyril, and her to a second Hypatia?"

Giulio Villaflor smiled a very expressive, a very devilish smile, mellow though it was.

"No. I have no desire to deify another Greek courtesan."

Was the word as foul slander to the living Athenian as it was to the dead Alexandrian?

His smile was answered in his listener's eyes; in that instant Victor almost forgave him the animosities of lengthened years, in that instant almost loved him and admired him; their natures were so kindred, they could stab so well with the same weapon.

"Precisely!" he said, with that persuasive tact which, save once, under the contempt of Idalia, had never deserted him. "Then pardon me, Monsignore; but will it not be well to conduct this matter with as little publicity as may be? Where there is danger for her, there will she remain; I know what she is. She has all the finesse of a Greek, but she has none of a Greek's cowardice. Moreover, it is to secure Viana that she is here (we will come to his affair afterward); he is all but gained to her, and he is rash and reckless to foolhardiness. At his villa of Antina, in the interior, there is, the day after to-morrow, a reunion of the 'Alpe al Mar' confederates, and, under cover of a masquerade, its political purpose has been kept strictly secret. Had even you not known of it through me, you would never have heard of it in any other light than as one of Carlo's splendid eccentricities and extrava-

gant entertainments. There is a password which, also, but through me, your Grace's choicest experts would not have been able to surprise. Ah, Monsignore, there is mine under mine; government spies are too often content to believe that when they have explored the topmost one they know all! There, at Antina, will be the Countess Vassalis, and not she alone; Caffradali, Aldino, Villari, Laldeschi, all the Neapolitans who are written in your Livre Rouge will meet. You may strike a great stroke at one blow; by day-dawn Viana and his glittering maskers may fill the Castel Capuano, if you will. Ask for what proofs against them you choose, you can have sufficient to justify the galleys for life against one and all of them; out of their own words shall you convict them, and, once yours, how shall this lawless Empress, this queenly Democrat, this patrician with the Marseillaise on her lips, this liberator with the pride of all the Empires in her heart, ever escape again to mine your thrones with her arts, to sap your creeds with her ironies, to arm your enemies with her riches, to overthrow your policies with her genius, to dare, to mock, to scheme, to revolutionize, to rule—to be, in one word, Idalia? Where will her power be when the same fetters as Poerio's hang on her wrists, where her loveliness when day and night the skies alone look on it from a chink in a dungeon wall, where her triumphs and her victories when the felon's branding-iron eats its hot road into her breast? She will be dead—as dead as in her grave."

The persuasive eloquence with which nature had endowed him left his tongue with a silken stealing sound, like the gliding movement of some serpentine thing, made more ornate in its eloquence by the richness of the Italian words he used. But there was beneath it the hiss of hatred, the ravenous thirst of desired vengeance, the lust that painted to itself her doom, and gloated on its own pictures with a hellish pleasure.

Giulio Villaflor caught that accent, and thought, with his acute trained wisdom:

"He has loved her—he will be true to us, then. There is no hate so sure-footed and so relentless as *that* hate."

"*Figlio mio*," he said, with his mellowest smile, resting

his glance so cruel yet so caressing on the man who henceforward would be no longer his master, but his instrument, once having let him glean his secret, "you should have been in our Church; you have an orator's powers. How many souls you would have won!"

"Pardon me, your Eminence! it is more amusing work, more to my taste at least—to lose them."

Monsignore smiled a gentle reproof.

"'Your Eminence!' You give me too high a title, my son."

"Forgive me a mistake the world will soon ratify! I only anticipate the future by a month or two."

Giulio Villaflor was flattered; courted though he was, he was not above the bait to his vanity and his ambition. The Cardinal's hat was the goal of his daring yet wary desires, and in his own mind he foresaw himself soon or late a second Leo X.; Pontifex Maximus in all the ancient power of the Papal tiara.

He let his eyes rest for a long moment on those of his companion; they were the deep, soft, full Italian eyes, like the brown, gentle, luminous eyes of the oxen of the Apennines; they could be tender in love as those of Venus Pandemos, they could be spiritual in religion as those of Leonardo's John, but also, they could be impenetrable as those of Talleyrand, they could be piercing in meaning and in discovery as those of Aquaviva, when, instead of the smile of the lover, or the benignity of the priest, he wore the mask of the diplomatist and politician.

"We understand each other, *figlio mio?*" he said, gently, while the violet gem of the episcopal ring glittered like the glance of a basilisk.

"We do."

They understood each other: and thus silently, while the aromatic light shone on the Vinci Passion, and without the melody of the waters beat sweet measure against the swaying orange-boughs, the seal was set to the unholy barter that betrayed a woman, and played the Iscariot to Liberty.

CHAPTER XVII.

"A TEMPLE NOT MADE WITH HANDS."

THE day on which Conrad Phaulcon left her was just in the mellow heat of noon, yet not oppressive where the great overhanging rocks with drooping masses of entwined foliage shut out the sun; and where in the privacy of her villa gardens Idalia came, leaving her prosecutor to his half triumphant and half mortified solitude.

Alone, she sank down on the stone bench that overlooked the sea, while the hound Sulla was crouched at her feet; alone, a profound weariness and dejection broke down the pride which had never drooped before her foe, while a passionate hatred quivered over the fairness of her face.

"Oh God!" she said, half aloud in the unconscious utterance of her thoughts, "and I once believed in that man as simple women believe in their religion! Fool—fool—fool! And yet I was so young then; how could I know what I worked for myself?—how could I know what depths of vileness were in him?"

The dog before her, lying like a lion at rest, with his muzzle down, lifted his head with a loud bay of wrath, and a snarling growl of menace and defiance: he heard the footsteps of Count Conrad passing downward on the other side of the villa toward the beach, and he hated him with all a hound's unforgiving intensity; once, months before, Phaulcon had been so incautious, in a fit of passion, as to strike the stately Servian monarch, and, but for Idalia, would have been torn in pieces for the indignity. Sulla had never pardoned it.

His mistress laid her hand upon his neck, and her teeth set slightly, while her splendid head was lifted with a haughty action that followed the color of her thoughts.

"Let him be, Sulla. The man who is *false* is beneath rebuke or revenge!"

And to those who should have known her rightly that proud contempt would have been more than any vengeance she could have given. She sat there many moments—moments that rolled on till they grew more than hours; her eyes watching the boats that passed and repassed below in the Capriote waters, her thoughts far from the scene around her. Her life had been changeful, varied, spent in many countries, and conversant with many things; its memories were as numerous as the sands, but what was written on them was not to be effaced as it could be effaced on the shore. The reverse of Eugénie de Guerin, who was "always hoping to live, and never lived," she had lived only too much, only too vividly. She had had pleasure in it, power in it, triumph in it; but now the perfume and the effervescence of the wine were much evaporated, and there was bitterness in the cup, and a canker in the roses that had crowned its brim. For——she was not free.

Like the Palmyran queen she felt the fetters underneath the purples, and the jeweled links of gold she wore were symbols of captivity; moreover, conscience had wakened in her, and would not sleep.

She rose at last; she knew many would visit her during the day, and she was, besides, no lover of idle dreams or futile regrets; brilliant as Aspasia, and classically cultured as Héloise, she was not a woman to let her hours drift on in inaction or in fruitless reverie; no days were long for her even now that she rebelled against the tenor and the purpose of her life.

With the hound beside her she left the cliff, and moved slowly, for the heat was at its height, backward toward her house; a step rapidly crushed the cyclomen, the leaves were swept quickly aside, and in her path stood Erceldoune. The meeting was sudden to both. It was impossible that either could for the moment have any memory save that of the words with which they had so lately parted; over the bronze of his face the blood flushed hotly, from the fairness of hers it faded; she paused, and for the moment her worldly grace forsook her, she stood silent while he bowed before her.

"Madame, I had your promise that you would receive me; not, I hope, in vain?"

The words were slight, were ceremonious, she had forbidden him all others; but in his voice were the feverish entreaty, the idolatrous slavery to her, which, repressed in speech, were so intense in his own heart.

"I do not break my promises," she said, gently; "and —and you will not do so either. Are you staying in Capri, that you are here so early?"

His eyes looked into hers with a mute, imploring suffering that touched her more deeply than any words could have done.

"While I have strength to keep my word, I will; I cannot say my strength will endure long—you put it to a hard test. How hard, God only knows!"

She stood silent a moment; then she moved on with a negligent dignity.

"Pardon me—I put it to no test. I but told you the terms on which our friendship can continue. I told you, too, that it were better ended at once; I say so now."

There was far more of melancholy than of coldness in the answer, chill though it might be; one long step brought him to her side as she passed onward, and his voice was low in her ear.

"We said enough of that last night! I will keep my word while I may; till I break it, I claim yours. Make my misery if you must, but let me cheat myself out of it one little hour more."

She turned her head slightly; and he saw that unpitying though her words were, her eyes were humid.

"If I could spare you any pain, I would!—believe me, believe that at least," she said, with an intonation that was almost passionate, almost appealing; she could not have this man, whose life she had rescued from the grave, and over whose agony she had watched in the Carpathian solitudes, think that she could wanton with his wretchedness, or be careless of his sorrow.

"Then—do what else you will with my life, but do not bid me leave you?"

She was silent, and she shook her head with a gesture of dissent; she knew that he prepared himself but added pain, but more enduring suffering, the longer he deceived himself with the thought or the simulation of happiness.

Yet, she asked herself, bitterly, why was she bound to send him from her as though she were plague-stricken?—why, since it was his will to linger in her presence, she should be compelled to drive him out of it?

Her honor, her pity, her conscience, her reason said—why delude him with a passing and treacherous hour of hope? Her heart pleaded for him—perhaps pleaded for herself;—her mood changed swiftly, though her character never; a natural nonchalance was combined in her with the dignity and depth of her nature. She was at all times too epicurean not to let life take its course, and heed but little of the morrow.

She gave a half impatient, half weary sigh.

"Well! be it so, if you will; for to-day, at the least," she said, with the accent of one who throws thought away, and resigns the reins to chance. "You stay in Capri? Have you breakfasted?"

"I thank you, yes; in a fishing-hut on the beach yonder."

"That must have been but a poor meal. I know what Capriote fare is, some smoked tunny and some dried onions! Come within."

He obeyed her, and forgot all else in the charm of that sweet present hour.

She had repulsed his love; she would have done so again had it been uttered; she had told herself that this man's gallant life must not be cheated into union with hers, this fearless heart must not be broken beneath her foot; though she should have spared no other she vowed to spare him, over whose perils she had watched while her hand held the living water to his dying lips. In what she now did, therefore, she erred greatly; but it was very hard for her not to err. She was used to reign, and was accustomed to follow her own pleasure, answering to none; she had known the world till she was satiated with it; she was in this moment utterly weary of her associates, weary almost of herself. There was a certain repose, a certain lulling peace, in the chivalrous and ennobling adoration she received from Erceldoune. She knew him to be a high-spirited gentleman, frank to a fault, loyal to rashness; with brave lion's blood in his veins and a noble

knightly faith in his love; beyond all cowardice of suspicion, and true unto death to his word. It was as strange to her, as it was sweet, to find such a nature as this; stranger and sweeter than any can know who have not also known life as she knew it—it was like a sweep of free, fresh, sea-scented Apennine air, stirred by the bold west wind, after the heat, the press, the bon-mots, the equivokes, and the gas-glitter of a Florentine Veglione.

It is difficult for any who survey mankind deeply and widely, to retain their belief in the existence of an honest man; but if they meet one, they value him far more than they who affect to imagine honesty as natural among men as beards.

The hock, the chocolate, the fish, the fruit, were scarce tasted as he took them that morning: he knew nothing but the shaded repose of the quiet chamber, the dream-like enchantment of the hour, the form before him, where, through the green tracery of the climbing vine, the golden sun fell across her brow and at her feet. He was almost silent; his love had a great humility, and made it seem to him hopeless that his hand could ever have title even to wander among the richness of her hair.

To have right to win her lips to close on his, it seemed to him that a man should have done such great and glorious things as should have made his life

> A tale of high and passionate thoughts
> To their own music chanted.

The full heat of the noon was just passed, the bells of afternoon vespers were sounding from a little campanile that rose above a jumbled mass of rock and foliage, gray jutting wall, and pale green olive woods; through a break in the foliage the precipitous road was just seen, and a group of weather-browned peasant women with the silver *spadella* in their hair, going upward to the chapel of S. Maria del Mare. Idalia rose, and followed them with her eyes. In an unformed wish, born of weary impatience, she almost envied them their mule-like round of life, their simple, dogged, childish faith, their nurtured indifference alike to pleasure and to pain.

"That animal life is to be envied, perhaps," she said.

rather to herself than to him. "Their pride is centered in a silver hair-pin; their conscience is committed to a priest; their credulity is contented with tradition; their days are all the same, from the rising of one sun to another; they do not love, they do not hate; they are like the ass that they drive, follow one patient routine, and only take care for their food;—perhaps they are to be envied!"

He rose also, and came beside her.

"Do not belie yourself! *You* would be the last to say so. You would not lose 'those thoughts that wander through eternity,' to gain in exchange the peace from ignorance of the peasant or the dullard?"

She turned her face to him, with its most beautiful smile on her lips and in her eyes.

"No, I would not: you are right. Better to know the secrets of the gods, even though with pain, than to lead the dull, brute life, though painless. It is only in our dark hours that we would sell our souls for a dreamless ease."

"Dark hours! *You* should not know them. Ah, if you would but trust me with some confidence—if there were but some way in which I could serve you——"

Her eyes met his with gratitude, even while she gave him a gesture of silence. She thought how little could the bold, straight stroke of this man's frank chivalry cut through the innumerable and intricate chains that entangled her own life. The knightly Excalibur could do nothing to sever the filmy but insoluble meshes of secret intrigues.

"It is a Saint's day: I had forgotten it!" she said, to turn his words from herself, while the bell of the campanile still swung through the air. "I am a pagan, you see—I do not fancy that you care much for creeds yourself?"

"Creeds? I wish there were no such word. It has only been a rallying-cry for war—an excuse for the bigot to burn his neighbor!"

"No; long ago, under the Andes, Nezahualcoytl held the same faith that Socrates had vainly taught in the Agora; and Zengis Khan knew the truth of theism like Plato; yet the world has never generally learnt it! It is the religion of

nature—of reason. But the faith is too simple and too sublime for the multitude. The mass of minds needs a religion of mythics, legend, symbolism, and fear. What is impalpable, escapes it; and it must give an outward and visible shape to its belief, as it gives in its art a human form to its deity. Come, since we agree in our creed, I will take you to my temple—a temple not made by hands!"

She smiled on him as she spoke, and a dizzy sweetness filled his life. He did not ask if she had forgotten her words of the past night—he did not ask whether in this lull of dreamy joy and passionate hope there might be but a keener deadliness of disappointment. He was with her; that sufficed. She went with him out into the brightness of the day, down the rocky paths, under shining walls of glossy ilex-leaves and drooping orange clusters of scented blossom. In the fair wild beauty of Capri, the tranquillity unbroken except by the lapping of the waves far down below and the distant echo of some sea-song, the sunlight that flooded land and water, the shadows sleeping lazily here and there where the lemon and citron-boughs were netted into closest luxuriance, the world seemed formed for love alone.

Since she had bidden his passion die in silence, why did she let him linger here?

He did not ask; he only gave himself to the magic of the present hour, to the sound of her voice as it thrilled in his ear, to the touch of her hair as he lifted from it some low hanging orange branch, to the sorcery of her presence.

The cool sea lay, a serene world of waters, scarcely ruffled by a breeze, and glancing with all the marvelous brilliance of coloring that northern air never can know. The boat waited in a creek, floating there under so dark a shadow from the drooping boughs of lemon and acacia, that it was almost in twilight: a few strokes of the oars, and it swept out of the brown ripples flinging up their surf against the rocks, into the deep blue of the sunlit bay; below, above, around on every side, color in all its glory, all its variety, all its harmony and contrast, melting into one paradise in the warmth of the summer day.

"I love the sea more dearly than any land! It is incarnate freedom!" she said, rather to herself than him, as she

leant slightly over the boat, filling her hand with the water till its drops sparkled like the sapphires in her rings. There was a certain aching tone in her words that sent a pang to his heart: it was the *envy* of freedom. Was she not, then, free?

"That is the charm my own moors have—the mere sense of liberty they give. Barren though they be, if you were to see them——"

His voice was unsteady over the last sentence. He thought of the dead glories of his race, of the squandered wealth and the fallen power that once would have been his by right; his to lay at her feet, his to make his fortunes equal with his name.

"You love liberty?" she said, suddenly, almost abruptly, save that all in her was too exquisitely harmonized, too full of languor and repose ever to become abrupt. "Tell me, would you not think *any* sin justified to obtain it?"

"Justified?"

"Yes, justified!" she said, impatiently, while her eyes flashed on him under their drooped lids. "What! do you know the world so well, and yet do not know that there have been crimes before now glorious as the morning, and virtues base as the selfish chillness that they sprang from? What was Corday's crime—what was Robespierre's virtue? Answer me. Would you think it justified, or not?"

A flush rose over his face quickly; he thought, he felt, that it was of her own liberty she spoke.

"Do not ask me!" he said, hurriedly, passionately. "You would make me a sophist in *your* cause. Evil is never justified, though done that good may come; but to serve you, to succor you, I fear that I should scorn no sin, nor turn from any!"

The words were almost wild, but they were terribly true. Though perhaps the less likely thus to fall because he knew his own weakness, he felt that the inflexible justice, the honesty of purpose, the unerring loyalty to knightly creeds, which were so ingrained in him that they were scarce so much principle as instinct, might reel, and break, and be forgotten if once this woman whispered:

"Sin—and sin for me!"

He thought he could deny her nothing—not even his

sole heritage of honor—if she could bend to woo it from him. A look of pain passed for one moment over her face. She thought of him as he had lain in his extremity, while her hand had swept back the dark luxuriance of his hair, and his eyes had looked upward into hers without sense or sight. Was it possible that she had saved him then only to deal him worse hereafter? She shook the sea-drops from her hand with a certain imperious impatient movement, and replied to him with the haughty negligence of her occasional manner.

"I asked you an impersonal question—no more; and if you cannot frame a sophism contentedly, you are terribly behind your age. We have rhetoric that proves fratricide only a *droit d'aînesse*, and logic that demonstrates a lie the natural right of man!"

He answered her nothing. She saw a look come on his face mortified, wounded, incredulous. There was something in her words, and in the accent of their utterance, that seemed to chill him to the bone, and freeze his very heart. The stately simplicity of his own character could not follow the manifold phases of hers. Moreover, he had spoken in the fervor of passion: she had answered him with what, if it were not half scorn, half cruelty, trenched close on both.

A certain pitying light glowed in her eyes as they read this, the languid and ironic smile passed from her lips, she sighed slightly, though it was half with a laugh that she spoke:

"Caro es, non Angelus.

Do you not remember the line in the 'Imitatione?' Be sure that you may say it to any human life you meet; above all, to a woman's! There is no angel among us; some faint rays of purer light here and there; that is the uttermost, and that so often darkened! I will give you the surest guard against the calamity of disappointment. Learn to say, and realize, of all you fancy fairest or noblest, this only—'*Caro es.*'"

He looked at her wistfully still; the temper of the man had too much directness, too much singleness, to be able to divine the veiled meanings of her varying words, the

seductive changes of her altered tones: he only knew that he felt for her as he had felt for no other woman.

"Caro es?" he repeated. "Well!—might I not also be answered with its companion line, 'Homo es, non es Deus?' I am no sophist; you have reproached me with it. Sophism is to me the shameful refuge of cowards who dare not own themselves criminals; but—but—even while I condemned what I loved, my love would not change; though she erred, *I* would not forsake her. 'Caro es?' What knell to love is there there? It is but to admit a common bond of weakness and mortality."

His voice was low and unsteady as he spoke, but it had a great sweetness in it; the love he was forbidden to declare for her he uttered to her in them.

She stooped and leant her hand over the side again, toying with the coolness of the water. His words had touched her keenly, and their loyalty sank deep into her heart. She shook her head with a slight smile—a smile of great sadness, of great compassion.

"You will be still in error! While you say the 'Caro es,' in *your* meaning, you will still expect more divinity than you will ever find on earth. It is, not that we are not angels—that only idiots dream—it is that we are——"

"What?"

"Worse than the worst of men too often! Hush! we will talk no more. We shall soon be near my cathedral."

She leant back in silence, while the vessel swept with a free, bird-like motion through the water, the boat-song of the Capriote rowers rising and falling with the even beat of their sculls, while behind them they left the rock of Capri, orange-crowned in the sunlight, with the soft gray hue of the olives melting down into the many-colored sea.

A low and darkling arch fronted them—the porch of the temple,—where the broad bay lay coolest and darkest, and the waters deepened into deeper blue. They bowed their heads; the boat shot down into the gloom, passing under the narrow passage-way, close and contracted as a cell; then out of its darkness the skiff glided, without sound, into the silent and azure vault of the cathedral to which she brought him.

It was the Grotto Azzuro.

The sea lay calm as a lake beneath, the blue and misty light poured through the silence, the Gothic aisles of rock rose arch upon arch in awful beauty; there was no echo but of the melody of the waves chanting ever their own eternal hymn in a temple not built of men. It was beautiful, terrible, divine in its majesty, awful in its serenity, appalling yet godlike in its calm; while through the stillness swept the ebb and flow of the sea, and all the sunless shadow was steeped in that deep, ethereal, unearthlike, azure mist which has no likeness in all the wide width of the world. The boat rested there, alone; and high above the arched rocks rose, closing in on every side, like the roof of a twilight chancel, lost in vague and limitless immensity; while through the calm there echoed only one grand and mournful Kyrie Eleison,—chanted by the choir of waves. Perfect stillness,—perfect peace,—filled only with that low and murmuring voice of many waters; a beauty not of land, not of sea, sublime and spiritual as that marvelous and azure light that seemed to still and change all hue, all pulse of life itself; a sepulcher and yet a paradise; where the world was dead, but the spirit of God moved on the waters.

Passion was stilled here; love was silenced; the chastened solemnity, the purity of its mysterious divinity, had no affinity with the fevered dreams and sensuous sweetness of mortal desires. The warm poetic voluptuous light and color of the land that they had left were the associates of passion; here it was hushed, and cast back in mute and nameless pain on its own knowledge of its own mortality; here there were rather felt "the pain of finite hearts that yearn" for things dreamt of and never found; the vagueness of far-reaching futile Promethean thirst; the impulse, and the despair, of immortality.

The boat paused in the midst of the still, violet, lake-like water. Where he lay at her feet, he looked upward to her through the ethereal light that floated round them, and seemed to sever them from earth.

"Would to God I could die now!"

The words broke unconsciously from him rather in the instinct of the moment than in conscious utterance. Her eyes met his, in them that dreamy and beautiful light that

seemed to float in unshed tears. She laid her hand one moment on his forehead with a touch so soft that it was a caress.

"Hush!—for what is worth life in us there will be no death!"

And the boat swept, slowly and noiselessly, through the crystal clearness of the waters, through the cold and solemn loveliness, through the twilight of the blue sea-mists, down into the narrow darkened archway of the farther distance, and out once more into the golden splendor of the living day—even as a human life, if men's dreams be true, may pass through the twilight shadows of earth down into the darkness of the valley of death, thence only to soar onward into the glory of other worlds, the radiance of other days.

She stooped to him slightly as the vessel swept away into the breadth and brightness of the bay.

"Is not my temple nobler than those that are built by men?"

He looked upward at her with a look in his eyes that had never been there before.

"You have taught me to-day what I never learned in all the years of my life!"

And the boat passed softly, silently, out of the sea-built temples that the waves had worn, out of the stillness and solemnity of that aerial light, onward through the heavy perfumes wafted from the shore, onward to where the Syren Isles laughed in their smiling loveliness upon the waters, half of earth and half of heaven.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"CRAVEST THOU ARCADY? BOLD IS THY CRAVING. I SHALL NOT CONTENT IT."

THE day had sunk away into evening before the boat returned; the splendor of the Capri moonlight was on sea and land, on the gray terraces of olives, with their silvery plumes of foliage, and on the green vines, clustering in the early summer over the steep stairs of rock and the stones of high monastic walls.

As they passed up the winding ascent, an old peasant sitting watching for the boat under the orange-boughs, a nut-brown, withered Capriote woman, of full seventy years, started from the shadow in Idalia's path, and fell on her knees before her, pouring out on her gratitude and benedictions. Idalia stooped and raised her:

"Do not kneel to me, old friend. You owe me nothing."

"I owe you my children's life, my children's souls!" cried the Italian in the patois of the bay, lifting her brown stern face all bathed in tears. "To whom should I kneel, if not to you? Day and night I prayed to S. Theresa to save them, and she never heard my words; *you* heard them. The saints in glory never had more fairness than your face, 'llustrissima;—they never had the pity of your heart, the charity of your hand. They let us pray on, pray on, and never speak; you heard and saved us."

The one she blessed raised her once more, with a gentle veneration for age in the action.

"You have thanked me too much, *madre mia;* far too much. The little any one of us can do to relieve sorrow is but such slight payment of so great a human debt. When Fanciulla is old enough to marry, tell her I will give her her silver wreath and her dower. No! no more thanks—you shame me! You, who have led so long a life of goodness, to bless *me!*"

She stooped lower still toward the old peasant, to drop

some gold into her kerchief unperceived, and passed on, while the praises and prayers of the Capriote were poured out, with tears staining weather-beaten, age-worn cheeks that in youth had never known so sweet a rain of joy and peace.

"Ah!" murmured Erceldoune to her, "you cannot ask me *now* to believe you, when you say 'Non angelus!'"

She turned her eyes on him with a sudden weary wistfulness, a sudden ironic scorn intricately commingled:

"I *do* say it. Repeat it till you believe it; it is a terrible truth. Here and there we do a little good;—save, as I saved to that poor Capriote, the life of starving infants, a legacy that her dead son left to drag her into the grave; children as bright as the morning, dying for want of the bread we throw away as we eat guinea peaches and two thousand-franc pine-apples!—what is the worth of it? It is a grain against a mountain—of evil!"

He looked at her with appealing pain; he felt vaguely that she, who to him was stainless as the morning, had the darkness of some remorse upon her, and yet he could neither follow the veiled intricacies of her nature, nor divest her of that divinity with which to-day yet more than ever he had clothed her. She glanced up at him and laughed.

"Do not look so grave; I never murdered any one in poisoned wines, or medicated roses; it is a good deal to say in these days of artistic slaughter! Believe me—a woman. If you rightly understand all those words say, you will never attribute me too much divinity, or ask me to oblige you with consistency. Mephistopheles always takes a woman's guise now; he has found he can change his masks so much more quickly! Will you dine with me? Dress? Oh! I will pardon your costume,—it is velvet, picturesque, rather Spanish."

She motioned him to take his way into the deserted library, and went from him down the corridors of the Villa Santilla, that they had reached while she spoke.

Had she any love for him? He had no belief that she could have. And yet—if there were none in her heart, was it not rankest cruelty to toy with him thus? No—he could not reproach her that it was; she had bidden him over and over again leave her, she had refused to hear words of love

from him, she had only acceded to his remaining near her at his own persisting prayer; there was no blame here. He had no thought that she could care in any way for his fate; the caprice of her manner, the mockery of her satire, the profound pathos that had tinged her words, the strenuous force with which she had bidden him think evil of her—these were not the ways of women to one they loved; they were the inconstancies of a heart ill at ease, of a spirit without rest and not without regret, but they were not the ways of a woman who loved. And yet an agony of passion was on him; he only felt, lived, thought, breathed, for her; and the purity of the sea-temple in which he had looked upon her face in the past day shed on her its own sanctity, its own exaltation. Nothing loftier, purer, more superb, ever rose in a poet's vision of idealized love than he had incarnated in his worship of her—worship whose grandest element was faith sublime in its very blindness.

At her villa that night there were a score of guests; all men, and all unknown to him; among them the Italian, Carlo of Viana, whose subjugation to her sway had been so proud a triumph. Men of the world though they might be, there was not one of them, not even the brave, bright, cordial southern Prince, who could wholly conceal the surprise and the dislike, almost the offense, with which they saw a stranger; their glances ranged over him curiously in a jealous challenge, and he felt as little amity to them.

"Count Phaulcon is not here?" asked the Prince of Viana of her.

"No. I regret to have to make his apologies; he is unhappily prevented the honor of meeting your Highness," she answered him, as they passed into the dining-chamber.

"And this foreigner; has he your pass, madame?" asked Viana, softly bending his head.

"He is not one of *us*, but he is my friend."

"Your friend, madame!" said Viana, with a certain smile that Erceldoune caught, and for which, though he could hear no words accompanying it, he could have tossed the Tuscan prince into the sea sounding below the cliffs. "A fair title, truly: but one with which none, I think, ever rest content!"

Viana said no more on the subject, but Erceldoune saw that, as in Turkey, so also in this larger gathering, his presence was unwelcome, and imposed a restraint on her guests, though not apparently on her. He was a curb put on them, and they bore it with chafing impatience, deepened in many of them by a jealous, surprised intolerance of this foreigner, with whom their hostess had entered the salons.

He himself sat in almost unbroken silence, eating little, drinking unconsciously much more than his wont. His thoughts whirled; he felt a fierce, reasonless hatred for all the men by whom he was surrounded. He saw her, through the haze of light and perfume and wine-odors and incense; he felt giddy, maddened, reckless; the fiercest jealousy was at riot in him, and the spiritual beauty of the earlier day was gone for the while from him, as it was gone from her.

He saw her now as she was in all the varied scenes of her dazzling and careless career. She took little heed of him, rarely addressed him, rarely looked at him; her silver wit, barbed and ironic, scathed all it touched; her delicate laughter rang its mocking chime at things human and divine; the diamonds on the rose hues and black laces of her costly dress glittered like the dews on a pomegranate. Her resistless coquetries enslaved whomever she would, and cast their golden net now on one and now on another; the heartlessness of a heartless code, the caprices of a world-wise imperious woman, used to be adored, and to tread the adoration at fancy beneath her foot, the recklessness of one accustomed to defy the world, and to stake great stakes on fortune, ruling her as utterly as a few hours before in the Grotto Azzuro high thoughts and noble regrets had reigned in her.

Which was truly herself of those characters so dissimilar? It would have been hard to tell. He would best have comprehended her who had judged—both. But to the man who loved her, let her be what she should, let her treat him as she would, the Protean changes in her tortured him as with so many masks that shrouded her beauty from him; the frank singleness of his nature was without key to the intricate complexity of hers. Had he seen her

first and solely as she was to-night—lying back in her chair, toying with her exotics glowing with rose and purple, touching the golden Lebanon wine or the luscious Lachryma, letting her eyes dwell with their lustrous languor now on one, now on another, and holding all those about her with a silver chain, surer than steel in its hold on them, ductile to her hand as silk,—he would have dreaded her power, he would have doubted her mercy, he would perhaps never have loved her.

Erceldoune listened to the words around him, but insensibly and uncertainly; his thoughts were on her alone; but when they reached his senses he heard the most advanced opinions of Europe, with the politics of the extreme Left, form the staple of all deeper discussion, and the basis of a thousand intricate intrigues and abortive projects that were circulated, often to be passed current with the seal of Idalia's approbation, much more often to be broken in two by some hint of later intelligence than theirs, or some satirically suggested comment languidly let fall by her on their excited warmth, like the fall of an icy spray. And yet there were moments when she was not thus, when she was more seductive in her eloquent expositions, her sudden and then impassioned earnestness, than in her nonchalance; moments when she spoke low, swiftly, brilliantly, with a picturesque oratory, persuasive, vivid, irresistible, till her guests' bold eyes glowed with admiration as they listened, and they were ready to lend themselves to her hands, to be moulded like wax at her will, without a will of their own. Then, as often, when she had roused them or wooed them to the height of the enthusiasm, the rashness, or the sacrifice she had sought to win from them, she dropped the topic as suddenly, with a languid indifference or a sarcastic jest, sinking back among her cushions, playing half wearily with the scarlet blossoms of her bouquet or the velvet ears of the hound, with hardly a sign that she remembered the presence of her numerous comrades.

Varied and glittering though the conversation that went on round him was, infectious and free as its gayety of tone was also, marked as might seem her confidence in him to introduce him there, and intoxicating to every sense as the

entertainment to which she had brought him might be, Erceldoune was wretched in it; he could comprehend nothing; he was jealous of every man at her table; everything he heard related to a party, but to which he referred, however indefinitely, his seizure in Moldavia. She scarcely looked at, rarely addressed him; in nothing, save her personal loveliness, could he recognize the woman with whom he had floated through the azure air of her sea-temple before the sun had set.

It was late when they rose from the table; cards were begun, while the windows stood open to the midnight, where the southern moon flooded the Mediterranean. Idalia threw herself into the hazard with the eagerness of a gamester; she played with the utmost recklessness, a hectic excitement shone in her eyes, the insouciant defiance of her wit rose with the risks of chance; she staked heavy sums, lost them, and only played the more eagerly still. Impair her charm even this insatiate passion could not do, distasteful though it be in women, and even abhorrent in women who are in their youth; as seductive she was, but there were danger, levity, heartlessness in the charm. She was now at her worst.

Once she glanced at the solitary form of Erceldoune standing out against the flood of moonlight; his face was pale and very grave, while his eyes had a pathetic wonder, rebuke, and pain in them;—she never looked at him again. The hours went on, and the play with them; only broken by intervals when hookahs and cool drinks were brought round, and the homage offered to hazard was offered to its beautiful empress. She lost very considerably for awhile, but the more she lost the more extravagantly she staked upon the cards; and fortune changed, pouring in on her its successes at length as lavishly as it had previously squandered her gold. So the short sweet night passed away, over the scattered hamlets that crowned the piles of rocks or nestled in sea-gray olive-woods;—passed away in the whirl of gambling, and the bitterness of jealous heart-burning, and the stir of restless passions. Without, where the waters lapped the shore so softly, and the islands hung in the starlit air like sea-birds' nests brooding above the waves, the aged, dying peace-

fully, dreamt of immortality, and children slept with smiles upon their lips under the low brown eaves of cabin roofs, and the eyes of poets, wakeful and laden with voluptuous thoughts, dwelt, never weary, on the silent sailing clouds, warm with the flush of earliest dawn; but here, within, there was but the fever of unworthy things.

Erceldoune, where he stood apart, glanced once or twice at that fair tranquil neglected night with an impatient sigh, as though to take relief from its balmy freshness and cool serenity amid the glittering martyrdom of the scene before him and the tumult of passion at work in him.

In the intensity of his pain he could have believed himself like the men in the old legends whom a sorceress bewitched; it was anguish alike to stay or to go; every moment he spent there was suffering as intense as when he had lain prostrate with the vultures wheeling above his eyes in the sickly light of the sun, yet he could not tear himself from its terrible fascination any more than he could then have torn himself from the power of the carrion birds. He believed in her; yes, not less utterly than when a few hours before he had heard her lofty and spiritualized thoughts unfold all diviner things, and lead him through the dim and glorious mysteries of a poet's speculations of eternal worlds. But he felt like a man in delirium tremens, who struggles with a thousand hideous and revolting shapes, that rise again as fast as he overthrows them. The atmosphere about her, the glances that dwelt on her, the profane mocking wit that woke her laughter, the eyes that met her own in such bold language, the gaming passion that, while it possessed at least, enslaved her, all these were so much desecration and profanation to his idol, so much blasphemy against the woman who had been with him in the pure stillness of the Grotto Azzuro. The sun above the eastward circle of bay rose, breaking over the sea, while the stars were still seen through its golden haze, in which they would, with another moment, die. Idalia looked at the sun, then left the gaming table.

"There is the day rebuking us. Good night!"

As she spoke she paused one moment, the full fresh light of the broken morning falling upon her, while around

was still the wax-glare of the chandeliers; the pure light lay before her, the impure glitter was behind.

She paused one moment, looking seaward, then turned negligently to her guests and dismissed them, with much carelessness, little ceremonial.

Viana pursued her with eager whispered words; she put him aside with a coquette's amusement and a graceful gesture of denial, and passed out, while the Nubian appeared and followed her.

The Prince, with stormy petulant anger on his face, left the room with his equerry. The others went out one by one.

Erceldoune remained silent and motionless; he neither saw nor heard what passed before him; he had bowed his farewell instinctively, but all that he knew were the smiles he had seen cast on others, and the bold look with which Viana had followed her, and for which he could have struck him down as men of his race struck their foes when a back-handed sweep of a heavy iron gauntlet dashed down all rivalry, and washed out all insult. Each of her guests, as they passed out, cast a look of suppressed and envious dislike at him where he stood, as though he had a right to remain thus behind them. He noticed nothing, was conscious of nothing; an intolerable agony, a burning, boundless jealousy alone were on him. He stood there like a man stunned, looking blankly out at the sunlit sweep of waters. Evil passions were not natural to him; but the life he had led had left the free untamable strength of the old Border Chiefs unaltered in him.

He stood there with no remembrance of how little right he had to remain, scarcely any remembrance even of where he was. All at once he started and turned. As a dog feels, long before human eyes can see or human ears can hear it, the approaching presence that he loves, so he felt hers before she was near him; through the inner chambers, dark in twilight, where the lights were extinguished and the dawn could ill penetrate, Idalia returned. Her step was weary, and her face, as the illumination from the chandelier still burning in the window where he stood fell on it, was pale, even to the lips on which, as some poet has it, "a sigh seemed set"—unuttered.

"You have remained after the rest!—how is that? It is as well, though, as it is. I wish to speak to you—alone."

The words themselves might have fed many a wild hope, many a vain thought, in any man less single-hearted and less incapable of misconstruing her meaning than he was. With him all the light died out from his face as he heard: he knew that if she would have listened to his passion she would not have returned to him now—she would not have addressed him thus.

He bowed gravely, and stood waiting for her pleasure. The forbearance was not lost on her. Idalia, more than any other woman, could appreciate this deference which gave her untainted comprehension, this delicacy which took no advantage of her return to him in solitude. She moved on toward one of the windows, and stood there, between the gray light of the rising day and the radiance of her own card-room.

"You have offered me many pledges of your service," she said, gravely, "nor do I doubt their sincerity. I am now about to test it; not on any ground that, as you think, my past slight aid to you gives me any claim upon your life—I have none whatever—but rather simply because I trust you as a gallant gentleman, as a chivalrous nature, as a true-hearted friend."

He bent his head in silence; he offered her no protestation of his faith: he knew that none was needed.

"I am about to ask you much," she resumed. "To ask you to undertake a service of some danger, of immediate action, and of imperative secrecy; it may involve you in some peril, and it can bring you no reward. Knowing this, are you prepared to listen to it?"

His face grew a shade paler beneath its warm sea-bronze. He divined well what her meaning was in those few words, "it can bring you no reward." But he answered without a second's hesitation.

"Do with me what you will," he said, simply; "I am ready."

There were no asseverations, no eager vows, no ornate eloquence; but she knew better than they could tell her that he was hers, to send out to life or to death at her choice.

She put out her hand to him with royal grace to thank him as sovereigns thank their subjects. She let his lips linger on it mutely, then, with no more emotion than queens show at that act of homage, she sank into a couch, and bent slightly forward.

"Listen! I want no political controversy, but it seems to me unutterably strange that you, with your bold high spirit, your passion for liberty, your grand contempt for conventionalities and station, should have no sympathy with a party whose cause is essentially that of freedom?"

He looked at her wearily. What were creeds and causes to him now?

"I am no politician," he said, briefly. "I have never mingled in those matters. I am neither a student nor a statesman. I hate tyranny. I would stamp it out wherever I saw it; but the codes of my race were always conservative. I may unconsciously have imbibed them."

She smiled with ironic disdain. He had touched the qualities in her with which she could rule men like children, and could have swayed a kingdom with the scepter of Russian Catherine or of Maria Theresa.

"'Conservative!' To reverence the divinity of rust and of corruption—to rivet afresh the chains of tradition and of superstition—to bind the free limbs of living men in the fetters of the past—to turn blind eyes from the light, and deny to thirsty lips the waters of truth—to say to the crowned fool, 'You are God's elect,' and to the poor, 'You are beasts of burden, only not, like other beasts, worthy shelter or fodder'—to cling to falsehood, and to loathe reason;—this is what it is to be 'Conservative!' Do you, who love freedom like any son of the desert, subscribe to such a creed as that?"

Now he saw her as those saw her who were subdued to her will, till no sense was left them save to think as she thought, and to do as she bade. The magic of the voice, the charm of the eloquence, the spell of the fearless truths, uttered with an imperial command, wrought on him as they had always done on others—as they could not fail to do on any man with a heart to thrill and a soul to be moved.

"I will believe what you believe!" he cried, passionately. "*You* are my creed; I have forgotten all others."

The brilliant fire which had been upon her face as she spoke, faded.

"Too many have made me their creed;—do you take some surer light to guide you. I do not seek a convert in you. You are happier, perhaps, if you can live thinking of none of these things. What I seek of you now is your service, not your adhesion. I want little else except your high courage; and I know that will never fail either you or others."

"Try it as you will."

There was a curious conflict of feelings in him as he heard her. He was moved to strong pleasure by the mere thought that she placed confidence, of whatever sort, in him, and he knew by her words that she held his honor, his faith, and his courage in full esteem; yet as strong a pain smote him heavily. He felt that these great purposes of her life, vaguely as he could imagine them, were dearer to Idalia than any individual love could become, and he felt also that in her manner to him which seemed to place him farther off from her than he had ever been.

She bowed her head in thanks to him.

"What I need is told in few phrases," she resumed. "The Conservative faction, that you favor, is in the full exercise of its iniquity in Naples—for a little while longer; a very little. There are to-night in my house—concealed here, I do not shirk the word—two of its greatest victims, an old man and a young, father and son. The elder is as noble a patriot and scholar as Boethius, with no other crime than this;—he wishes the freedom of his Italy. King Francis plays the part of Theodoric. Once arrested, the fate of Boethius will be his. Less severity, perhaps, but the galleys, at best, await his only son, fresh from the campaigns of Sicily. By intelligence I have of the government's intentions, I know they will not be safe here three hours longer. I left my own yacht at Trieste; besides, it could not approach Naples without being searched, or probably brought-to by a broadside. Yours is here; will you save these men, take them secretly on board, and land them on the coast of Southern France? I give you my word that they have no other sin than one that is the darkest, perhaps, in the world's sight—to love truth and

liberty too dangerously well;—how much they have suffered for these you will know when I tell you that they are Filippo and Cesario Fiesoli."

An eager light flashed into his eyes, a noble indignation flushed his face; he knew the names well—the names of men who, for the choicest virtues of the patriot's and thinker's and soldier's characters, had endured the worst persecutions of the Neapolitan Bourbons. Whatever he thought of creeds and causes, he loathed tyranny and oppression with all his heart and soul.

"Save them? Yes, if I lose my own life to do it."

She looked at him with a smile; how often she had seen that lion spirit, that eagle daring, lighten in temperaments the most diverse at her bidding!

"Ah! I thought your sympathies must always rise with liberty, and your hatred with oppression, or you would have belied your whole nature. I would make you 'with us' in an hour's reasoning."

His eyes met hers with something pathetic in their wistful gaze—as though they besought her not to trifle with him.

"You never need to reason with *me*. You have only to say, 'I will it.'"

An absolute obedience this, an utter unquestioning submission, prostrate as any that ever laid Marc Anthony at Cleopatra's mercy, or Héloise at Abélard's; yet he did not lose his dignity in it; it was lofty even while it was subject. It touched her, yet it pained her; it brought home to her the intensity and truth of this man's devotion; she would not, or could not, return it or repay it; she had no right, she bethought her, with a pang, to use it as she had used it with so many, to the furtherance of her own aims, however generous or just those aims might in this instance be. Moreover, she had come to say other and more bitter things to him than this.

She was silent a moment, looking at him where his gallant height rose against the clear subdued light of the breaking day; her future task was more painful than she, consummate mistress of every toil and art, and used to control every mood and every passion of men, had ever known one yet to be.

"Weigh the peril well," she said, after a pause, with something of restraint upon her. "It must be great—I mean, if you are discovered. Discovery may be guarded against, but it cannot be positively averted at all channels. If you will risk the danger of detection, your yacht can weigh anchor at once. She is, of course, in readiness? The Fiesoli, father and son, disguised as Capriote fishermen, can row you to the vessel among others. They are ready to take the alarm at any instant, and sleep dressed in their disguises. They will probably pass in safety; the Marinari here are dull and unsuspicious, nor would they harm what I shelter for a thousand ducats each. But, should detection occur, remember, the Bourbon government will not spare you even for your country's sake. You will have rendered yourself liable to the law for assisting the escape of condemned 'conspirators' and 'insurgents,' as the Court terms them, and you will share the fate they suffer."

The words were almost cold, but uttered with a visible effort; in the instant, even though the urgency of peril for those she sought to save, and the motive for which she bade him expose himself to this risk at her command, excused it to her, she loathed herself for sending him out to chance the slightest danger in fealty to a love that would never bring him anything except its pain. Indeed, his life was dearer to her than she, disdainful of all such weakness, yet would know.

He raised himself erect.

"I have given you my word; I am not used to weigh the hazards of any dangers that may accrue to me through keeping it."

She answered him nothing; the implicit obedience this man was ready to render her, even to the rendering up of his life or liberty at her word, moved her the more deeply beside the bold honor and the fearless independence of his carriage toward men, such as now flashed out even to her in his reply. Once again unseen by him as she leaned her brow upon her hand, there came upon her face the warmth, and in her eyes the look, with which she had gazed upon him in the previous night. It passed; she rose and stood again in the shadow of the myrtle-covered casement, looking from him out toward the sea.

"When will you be ready, then?"

"I am so now. Your friends can row me on board when you will, and the yacht can weigh anchor with them at once."

"And you take no more thought than that of periling your life for strangers?"

"I have never taken much thought for my life that I can recollect. Besides, what need is there of thought? You wish it."

He spoke only in the singleness of his fidelity, in the earnestness of his devotion to her; but the most refined subtilty of art and purpose could not have taught him a better means to win his way toward the tenderness of Idalia's nature, and an infinite tenderness there was, let her lovers and her foes say what they would.

Her cheek lost the warmth it had regained, her face had the same sadness on it which it had worn as she had entered the chamber, the intense melancholy which now and then fell on her at rare intervals gathered in her eyes. She pitied him, she honored him; she would willingly, at all cost to herself, have effaced every thought which bound him to her, and saved him from every pang that came to him through her; but she was too proud and too world-worn to recognize that there might be a feeling even beyond this in her heart for him. Even had she recognized it, it would not have changed her purpose—the purpose which had made her let him see her as he had done through the past evening—the purpose to toy with him no more, but to put from him, now and forever, the vainness of hopes which could but fatally beguile, only to as fatally betray, him.

She could do this as no other woman could have done; she had dealt with men in all the force of their enmities, all the height of their follies, in their most dangerous hours as in their most various moods; through paths no other of her sex could have approached, Idalia passed unhesitating and with impunity, and one of the secrets of her great power lay in her perfect and unerring knowledge of human nature. With the first hour in which she had seen the man who now stood with her, she had known his character as

profoundly as she knew it now. She turned to him, and spoke softly, yet with a certain grave and haughty grace.

"I do not pretend to misunderstand you; to do so would be but to imitate the mock humility of foolish women. You would do this thing for my sake; if done at all, it must be done for the pure sake of justice and compassion, not for mine. You gave me your promise that no other words like these should pass between us, and I told you if it were broken we could meet no longer."

He looked at her bewildered; she seemed to him to toy with him most recklessly, it was a deadly trial to his faith not to believe most mercilessly also.

"That promise I must break, then. It is the only one broken in my life. My God! why do you play with me so? You *know* what my love is!"

His voice sunk to a breathless fervor; he stooped forward, his lips trembling, his eyes seeking hers with an anguish of entreaty. That look almost broke down her resolve; it was so easy to soothe this man's loyal heart with a smile, with a glance; it was so hard to put an end forever to that imploring prayer. Hard to her at least, now, when for the first time some portion of the heavy blow she had so often dealt fell on her, some scorch of the fiery pain she had so often caused touched herself, if it were but by sympathy and pity. Yet she was unmoved from her resolve; she was unflinching in a course once chosen, and she was resolute to fool him on no more with empty hope, to let him blind himself no longer. She wished to save him, as far as she could still effect this, from herself, and to do so she sacrificed his faith in her with a ruthless and unsparing hand.

"I do know it," she answered him; and her voice had no tremor in it, her face no warmth, her eyes dwelt on him with a melancholy in which no softer or weaker consciousness mingled. "And because I know it, and know its strength and its nobility, I will not dupe it or dupe you. What avail to lead you on after a mirage, to let you cheat yourself with fond delusions? Better you should know the truth at once—that what you feel for me can only bring you pain; strive against it for your manhood's sake."

He staggered slightly, and bent his head like a man who

receives a sudden sickening blow; despite the revulsion of the last few hours, it fell on him with the greater shock after the peace and beauty of the day they had passed together on the sea.

She looked at him, and a shadow of his own suffering fell on her; she could not strike him thus without herself being wounded—without a pang in her own heart. Yet what she had determined to do as she saw him standing aloof that night with the rack of wondering grief, of incredulous reproach upon his face, she carried out now, cost her in its loss—even to her fair fame—whatever it should.

She turned to him with a sudden impulsiveness most rare with her, and in her eyes something of the defiance with which she had fronted Conrad Phaulcon mingled with an infinitely softer and more mournful thing.

"Listen! As you have seen me to-night, *I am*. That higher, holier light you view me through is in your own eyes, not in me. Ask those whom you saw with me; they will tell you I am without mercy—believe them. They will tell you I have ruined many lives, blessed none—believe them. They will tell you you had better have died in the Carpathian woods than have fallen beneath my influence—believe them. Take the worse that you can learn, and credit it to its uttermost. Tell yourself till you score its truth into your heart, that I have never been, that I shall never be, such as you imagine me. Your love can be nothing to me; but I would save it from its worst bitterness by changing it into hate. I would not even forbid *you* to change it into scorn."

Her eyes were prouder than they had ever been as she thus bade the man, who had centered in her his purest and most exalted faith, give to her the shame of his disdain. As she spoke, with her resistless beauty touched to a yet nobler dignity as she uttered this attainder against her own life, he must have loved her less, or have believed evil swifter than the one who heard her now, who could have followed out her bidding, and stamped the warning down into his soul, till all love of her was dead.

He looked at her in silence, and in the heart-stricken pathos of that look she saw how utterly she laid life desolate for him—she felt the recoil of the living death she

dealt, as now and then the hunter feels it when he meets the upward dying gaze of the stag his shot has pierced.

In that instant, while his faith was beaten down for the first moment under the scourges of her words, and the chivalrous idolatry he bore her was bent and blinded under the dead weight of her own self-accusation, the baser alloy of passion alone was on him—he was only conscious of that madness in which men are ready, as to yield themselves to an eternity of shame and torture,

So that this woman may be mine!

She saw that in him; she knew its force, its meaning; she knew that in this instant of his anguish her loveliness was all he felt or sought.

"No matter what you are," he muttered, breathlessly, "no matter what you bring me—I love you, O God! as no man ever, I think, loved before. Have you no pity on *that?* Be what you will, if—if——"

His voice sank, leaving the words unfinished; he felt powerless to plead with her; he felt hopeless to touch, or sway, or implore her; and also, beyond all, he could not even, on the acceptance of her own testimony, dethrone her from his stainless faith, any more than a man can at a word tear out from him as worthless a religion that he has cherished as divine through a long lifetime.

The darkest passions had no terror for her; she had known them over and over again at their worst, and had ruled them and ruled by them. But deepest pity was in her heart for him; she sought to save him, even at all sacrifice to herself, and she saw that it was too late; she knew, as his eyes burned down into hers, that, though they should part now and forever, this longing she had wakened would consume him to his grave.

A woman weaker and more pliant would have yielded to that impulse, and have given him tenderness; to the pride and to the truth of Idalia's nature to have stooped so far had not been possible.

"Love is no word for me," she said, with calmness, underneath which a vibration of deeper feeling ran. "I am weary of it; and I have none to give. I have played with it, bribed with it, ruled by it, bought by it, worked

on it, and worked through it—evilly. I cannot do that with you. I must give you suffering. I will not also give you danger. Take your promise back; I absolve you from it."

Her eyes were turned toward the sea, and not to him, as she spoke; she could not watch the misery she dealt. She knew as though she saw it the look that came upon his face—darker and deadlier than the physical anguish that had been upon it when she had found him dying in the Carpathian pass. She had stricken him strengthless; she had refused his love; she had refused even his belief in her, even his homage to her; she had condemned herself for the evil that she wrought, and she stood aloof from him, imperial, world-weary, rich in the world's wealth, without a rival in the sovereignty of her beauty and her will. Rich himself in those accidents of power and possession which she owned, he might have pleaded still, on the ground of his wretchedness, against her fiat; but in the pride of his beggared fortunes his lips were sealed to silence; he could not force his love, having no treasure upon earth save that to give, upon the empress of those brilliant revels on which the dawn had lately broken, upon the mistress of those high ambitions which seemed alone to reach her heart; upon a woman so proud, so peerless, so throned in every luxury and every splendor as this woman was. She was not haughtier in her magnificent command than he in his ruined poverty; and in that moment he had not force, nor memory, nor consciousness left to him. He only suffered dumbly and blindly, like a dog struck cruelly by the hand he loves, the hand he would have died in striving to obey.

She looked at him once—only once—and a quick sigh ran through her. Had she saved him from the fangs of the carrion beasts and the talons of the mountain birds merely to deal him this? Better, she thought, have left him to his fate, to perish in a nameless grave, under the eternal shelter of the watching pines! Yet she did not yield. Without a glance or a sign she moved slowly away across the chamber;—their interview was over, its work was done.

His step arrested her: he moved forward with a faint

slow effort, like one who staggers from the weakness of long illness.

"Send those you spoke of to me; I do not take my promise back."

She turned her eyes full on him with a sudden light of wonder, of admiration, of amaze.

"You would do that—*now?*"

"I have said—I will."

She looked at him one lingering moment longer; all that was great, and high, and fearless in her nature answering the royalty in his; then she bent her head silently.

"I thank you. Be it so."

And with those words only, she left him.

CHAPTER XIX.

"THE LIGHT IN THE DUST LIES DEAD."

In a distant apartment of the villa a youth lay sleeping, his richly-tinted face with the black curls falling back from the bold brow, like one of the beautiful boys who loved, and laughed, and danced, and sung in one long carnival, from sunset to sunrise, in the glad Venice of Goldoni. He slept soundly, as only youth sleeps, dressed in a Capriote fishing suit; and on his chest, as the striped shirt fell back from it, there were the scars of deep wounds just healed—no more—over the strong fearless beatings of his young heart. A little distance from him sat his father, an old man, with the grand head of a noble of Tintoretto's or Bassano's canvas—the head of the great medieval signori who filled the porphyry palaces, and swept through the Piazza San Marco, in the red gold of glowing summer evenings, when the year of revel was held in Venice for the Foscari's accession, and the City of the Waters was in her glorious reign. The elder man was not sleeping; his eyes were on his son. He had lost

three such as that sleeping boy for Italy—three trampled down under the tread of Austrian armies or of Pontifical mercenaries; the one left was the last of his name. But he would have sent out a hundred more, had he had them, to bring back the dead grandeur to Rome, to see the ancient liberties revive, and the banner of the free republic float in spring-tide air above the fresh lagoons and over the green-wreathed arches of his beloved Venezia.

They had suffered much, both of them, for liberty; but they were both willing to suffer more—the boy in the dawn of his manhood, and the elder in the weariness of his age. There was no sound in the chamber; food and wine stood near; the shutters were closed; through a small oval aperture the glowing sun in the hour of its sunrise alone penetrated, flooding the floor with seven-colored light. From the dawn without there came a faint delicious odor of carnations, of late violets, of innumerable leaves. The door opened noiselessly; through it came Idalia. The old man started and rose, took her hand and pressed it to his lips, then stood in silence. She glanced at the sleeping youth, lying there in so profound a rest with a smile on his arched full lips.

"Poor boy!" she said, softly; "it is a cruelty to waken him. Dreams are the mercies of life. Yet there is no time to be lost. You may be saved still."

"What! your friend will serve us so well as that?" asked the Italian, wonderingly. "But it is not strange; the English are a bold people; they never refuse to resist oppression."

Over Idalia's face swept an unspoken contempt.

"The individual English, no!—but the nation would let any freedom be strangled like a hanged dog, rather than risk its trade or lose a farthing."

"But it is a great risk for him. We have no right to expose him to it."

"No; we have no right," she answered, almost bitterly. "Not a shadow of right!—still he accepts it: he does not heed peril. What brave man does?"

"For you."

The words were softly added; the old Venetian looked at her with a mournful fixity, an unuttered interrogation.

She turned slightly from his gaze; she knew what was in his thoughts; she knew that he reminded her of the many who had gone out to peril, and fallen beneath it, for her sake.

"We can waste no time, caro amico," she said, rapidly, in his own liquid, caressing Venetian tongue. "The earlier you leave, the less likelihood of detection. He will wait for you on the shore; you will row him to his vessel among others; nothing can be simpler. You will be safe with him."

Something that was almost the weakness of tears rose in her eyes as she spoke; she thought how entirely her trust would be preserved; how surely, at risk of very life, he, whom she recompensed with cold words and bitter neglect, would redeem his promise.

Over the browned, stern, noble face of Filippo Fiesoli the warmth of his lost youth stole; a look came into his glance that only was not love because chastened by so utter a hopelessness, and purified from all touch of passion.

"Ah!" he murmured, in his snow-white beard, "I can give you nothing, save an exile's gratitude and the blessing of an old man near his grave. You noblest among women!—what you have risked for us!"

Idalia's eyes softened with a mellow wistful tenderness, with an unspeakable regret.

"Ah, Fiesoli! if all patriots were pure, all liberators true as you are, my best friend, I would count every loss my highest, holiest gain! But there is so much dross amid the little gold, there are such coward villainies masked under freedom's name. *I*, too, 'noblest among women!'—O God, sometimes I think myself the vilest!"

He sighed; he knew her meaning; the grand pure heart of the old patriot would not take on itself the falsehood of flattering disguise.

"You are noblest in much," he said, softly; "something too pitiless, something too alluring, it may be, to the many who love you; but your errors are the errors of others, your nobility is your own."

She shook her head.

"Gentle sophisms and full of charity, but not true.

My errors are my own, woven close in my nature and my mind; such nobility as you speak of—if I can claim it—comes rather from the recklessness of courage, the passion for liberty, the hatred of tyranny, than anything better in me. But I am not here to speak of myself; there is not an instant to be lost; wake Cesario, poor child, and then leave me. We are too used to life and partings to feel this sudden or strange; but, my dear friend, my honored friend, peace be with you, if we never meet again."

She held out both her hands to him with a look on her face that her lovers had never seen there, so gentle, so softened, so full of reverent sweetness. Filippo Fiesoli stooped over them in silence, pressing them in his own; he was an old man, very near his last years, as he had said, but perhaps in all the homage that had been lavished on her, she had never had one heart more nobly and more purely hers than was that of the great age-worn patriot's. His voice was unsteady as his farewell was spoken.

"Death will take me, most likely, before I can ever look upon your face again; but my dying breath will be a prayer for you."

There was an infinite dignity, a sublime pathos, that were beyond all pity in the benediction; age had set its barrier of ice betwixt them, and the grave alone waited for him, but the love wherewith he loved her was very rare on earth.

Without another word he turned from her, and awoke his son. The young soldier sprang up alert, and ready on the instant: he had often wakened thus with the Sicilian legions. As he saw Idalia, his beautiful Titian face flushed, his eyelids fell shyly as a girl's, he sank before her on one knee with the old grace of Venice, and touched the hem of her dress with his lips. She smiled at him, an indulgent, gentle smile, such as she would have given a caressing animal.

"There is no time to spare in courtesies, Cesario. The moment is come. You are ready?"

The boy's lips trembled.

"A soldier is always ready, but—if you would rather let me die near you, than send me out to exile!"

She passed her hand lightly, half-rebukingly, over the silk of his dark curls.

"Foolish child! you talk idly. To stay here were to be locked in the dungeons of the Capuano. Go with your father, Cesario mio; your first duty is to him, your second to Italy and to liberty."

The youth's eyes gleamed with the fire of the South and the fire of the soldier—the fire that her words could light as flame lights the resinous pine-wood.

"My *first* is—to you."

She smiled on him; she knew the romantic adoration that he bore her would harm him little, might lead him far on noble roads.

"Scarcely!—but if you think so, then obey me, Cesario. Give your thought, beyond all, first to your father; give the life that remains through all trial and all temptation to Italy and to freedom."

The boy's earnest, impassioned gaze looked upward at her through a mist of tears.

"I will!" he murmured, fervently—"I will."

She drew her hand from him with a slight gesture of pain; she had seen that gaze from so many eyes, she had heard that vow taken by so many voices. Eyes that were sightless; voices now forever stilled.

"Farewell," she said, gently, to both. "I will send my Albanian to you—he can be trusted; and you must go down alone to the shore. Give this to my friend, and he will know you. He will be in waiting."

She took from her hand one of her rings, a lapis-lazuli stone of ancient workmanship, and held it out to the elder Fiesoli; then, without longer pause, she passed from their presence. The boy Cesario flung himself down on the couch she had just risen from, and with his head bowed on his arms sobbed like a woman, he was a bold and gallant soldier, but he was but a youth; his father stood motionless, the morning sunlight, as it strayed through the oval in the casement, falling with a golden hue upon his grand bronzed brow and the white sweep of his patriarch's beard. Differently they both loved her, equally they alike knew their love hopeless.

Idalia passed on to her own apartments. These were not the first lives she had saved by many; at personal cost, personal peril; saved with courage, and daring, and

fertile expedient; but they were as nothing to her in this moment beside the many more that through her had been lost. She had not yet slept or rested for a moment, but she felt no sense of fatigue, no willingness to sleep. Alone, the proud sapphire-crowned head of the coquette, the *lionne*, the sorceress, the brow that would have borne so royally the Byzantine diadem of her ancestral Commeni, drooped wearily, yet not from physical weariness; the flush upon her cheeks had faded, and her form, with its trailing rich-hued skirts, and jewels flashing in an eastern splendor, was in strange contrast with the melancholy of her attitude and of her thoughts as she stood there in solitude at last, with the dawning light of the young day shut out by draperies of falling silk, and a single Etruscan lamp only burning near.

"Now he has seen me as I am," she thought—"as I am!" A smile crossed her lips, but it was a smile more sad than tears;—there was in it so much hatred of herself. "It was but just to him. No cruelty from me would kill his love, but his own scorn may. *They* love me for my beauty, because I charm their sight and their senses, because they are fools, and I know how to make them madmen! So that a woman were lovely, they would care not how vile she might be! But he—he has the old knightly faith, the old gallant honor! he gives his heart with his passion; he must revere what he adores. He has seen me as I am to-night; the pain was deadly to him; yet, if it rend me out of his memory, he may live to be grateful for it."

The warmth of the chamber seemed stifling to her, the perfumed oil of the lamp oppressive; the room itself, with its hangings, its cabinets, its decorations, its countless bagatelles of art and wealth, of extravagance and of effeminacy, struck on her loathsomely.

"Ah! how like my life!" she thought, with an impetuous scorn. "The pure day is shut out, and all that is heated, unreal, luxurious, meretricious, worthless, is chosen instead! A diamond-studded, gas-lit, dangerous lie, instead of the sunlight of truth!"

She pushed the heavy folds of a curtain back, and opened the casement beyond it; as the villa overhung the sea, so

the window jutting out overhung the rock, and gave to view in one grand sweep the whole bow of the bay, with the white mists of earliest day resting still midway between earth and heaven. Sound there was none, save close at hand the low music of a monaco's wing, and from afar the swinging cadence of a chiming angelus.

She stood silent, looking long outward through the fragrant coils of orange-blossom and of climbing ivy that hung in their green shadow before the oval of the window, toward the waking world that smiled below. To her, whose heart had never beaten for one of those which had throbbed for her, there came at last some recoil of the suffering which she had so often dealt, some touch of that futile pain which for her and through her had been so often borne. She saw still, in memory, the wondering and grieved reproach of the eyes which had haunted her throughout all the past hours.

"Do I love!—*I!*" she thought, while a laugh half haughty, half ironic, and yet more mournful than either, came on her lips. And she turned back again from the brightness of the day with a gesture of her old imperious disdain. She was too proud, too skeptical, too used to command, too unused to weakness, not to be loth to admit such yielding folly in her, not to be contemptuous of her own softer thoughts and tenderer impulses. Love!—to her it was a fool's paradise, a gay and glittering masquerade, a scepter with which to sway a court of madmen, a weapon with which to reap the harvests of gold and power, a passion that men got drunk with as with raki, and through which, as they pampered or inflamed it, women could indirectly rule the world. Her contempt for it had been as great as the sovereignty with which she had used it.

It was bitter to her to think that she could have so much weakness in her—so much living still beneath all that she had seen, known, done, to slay it by the roots. Something of the warmth of passion, something of its tenderness, were on her; and she flung them away, she would not have them. The unquestioning fealty which was ready to do her will at all and any cost, the devotion to her which, without any recompense, any hope, any self-interest, accepted the peril from which she had offered to free him,

and with a simple grandeur claimed the right to be true to his word: these moved her as nothing else could have done. Tempests had swept over her, leaving her utterly unswayed by them; the rarity which touched her as something strange and unfamiliar was the unselfishness of the love he bore her. Many had loved her as well; none so generously.

She could see the shore far below—down through a wreathing, shimmering interspace of green leaves. She had rescued men at far keener, closer danger than there was in this. She had gone to Russian mask-balls, ignorant whether at any moment the hand of an Imperial officer might not be laid on her domino, and her fettered limbs be borne away without warning, through the frozen night, over leagues on leagues and steppes on steppes of snow, to the Siberian doom which awaits the defenders of Poland. She had swept at a wild gallop through the purple gloom of the midnight Campagna with her courage only rising the higher, her eyes only gleaming the darker. She had glided in her gondola through balmy spring sunsets, when all Venice was wreathed and perfumed with flowers in some Austrian *festa*, and had laughed, and coquetted, and stirred her fan, and listened languidly to the music, while hidden beneath her awning was one whom the casements of the Quadrilateral would inclose only to let him issue to his death, unless her skill could save him. She had passed through many hours of supreme peril, personal and for others, and the disquietude had not been on her that was on her now.

She leaned there against the casement watching the beach beneath, where it stretched out along the glittering sea. It was still only the daybreak, but the fisher-folk were astir, in different groups, spreading out their nets in the warmth of the rising sun, or putting out in their boats from the shore. There was glowing color, picturesque movement, life, healthful, active, innocent, along the gray line of the sand; she sighed half impatiently as she watched it. Was it good to have no thought, save of a few fish?—no fear, save of the black swoop of the mistral?—no care in life, save for those striped sails, and those brown keels, and those sun-browned, half-naked children tumbling in the surf?

No; she did not so belie herself as to cheat her thoughts into the lie; she would not have relinquished the power, the genius, the vitality, the knowledge of her life, for a thousand years of the supreme passionless calm that looks out from the eyes of Egyptian statues, far less for the dull brute routine of peasant ignorance and common joys.

On the sands Erceldoune waited, leaning against a ledge of rock, with his eyes fixed absently on the waters. Even at the distance he was from her she could see the profound weariness that had altered his bold and soldier-like bearing, the hopeless melancholy that darkened his face as the light of the dawn fell upon it. She was not a woman to wish things done undone, or to know the vacillations of regret; yet, in the moment, she almost wished the words unspoken which had been uttered by her in a sudden impulse and resolve to let him blind himself no longer.

"It is useless to try and save him now," she thought; "*he* will never forget."

There was something which touched her infinitely in that guard he kept there; patient as the Pompeian soldier standing at his post, while the dark cloud of the ashes and the liquid torrent of lava-flame poured down, certain as he that no reward could come to him for his unrecompensed obedience, save perhaps one—death.

The Venetians left her garden. She saw them approach, and address him; she saw him start as the elder man handed him the ring, and, as he took it, give one upward glance at the eyrie of the villa where she leaned. Then he signed to him the sailor whom he had first spoken with on the night of his arrival at Capri.

There was an instant's terrible suspense as the Capriote stood curiously eyeing these two unknown sailors, whose presence on his shore he felt odd and unwelcome, since living was poor in the Picola Marina, and strangers likely to take a share of it were commonly roughly handled: then he gave good-humored assent to whatever had been asked of him and launched his boat into the breakers with the single force of his broad breast and brawny arms. He motioned the unknown fishermen to take the oars, with somewhat of a sullen grace, as though their advent still annoyed him; he took the helm himself; Erceldoune flung

his limbs down across the benches; the little skiff put out to sea. Thus far the work was done.

As the boat left the shore he turned, rose slightly, and looked back at Capri; that mute farewell, that speechless witness of how his promise had been redeemed, smote her keenly.

She watched the movement of the boat through the waves, with the daybreak light upon the stripes of its orange awning—watched it as it receded farther and farther, the tall figure of the Capriote standing at the prow, in his loose white shirt and his brown brigand-like Italian beauty—watched it till it swept out unarrested, unobserved, to where the yacht rocked at anchor.

The boat reached the vessel's side; a while longer, and the anchor weighed in the quiet of the dawn, while the only things that stirred on the whole width of the bay were a few scattered fishing-craft. She, leaning there against the gray of the stone, looking out through the wreaths of the leaves, never left her watch, never relaxed her gaze. She knew the tigers who slept yonder where Naples lay; she knew the cannon that would boom out through the sunny air if the errand of the Etoile was dreamed of; she knew the dungeons that yawned in the Vicaria for those who fled. She could not tell how much, how little, of the escape that she had organized was known to the Bourbon court; she could not tell that the government of Francis might not be only seeming to slumber, that it might crouch like a jungle-beast the surer to seize. She could not tell, even though to no living being had a word been whispered of her intent; she could not tell, for walls have ears where tyranny rules and priestcraft listens.

Any moment while the anchor was slowly wound upward, and the rigging of the yacht swarmed with eager sailors, the alarm-gun might boom from Naples, and the pursuit run down the schooner, boarding and swamping her in the midst of the smiling seas of the tranquil dawn.

At last she moved; her white sails filled with a fair wind, her helm was turned straight westward, her ensign of St. George fluttered in the favoring breeze. With an easy gliding motion, like a swan's, she passed through the

sunlit waters, unnoticed, unpursued. Against her rails one figure leaned motionless; his eyes were turned toward the rock, hanging so far above, where the villa was suspended like a falcon's nest; turned there always while the yacht passed onward, out beyond Capri, beyond Ischia, beyond the range of Neapolitan guns and the pursuit of Neapolitan ships, outward to round the snow-peaks of the eyrie of the Bonaparte eaglets, and to steer on toward the southern coast of France, in safety.

As it receded, slowly, surely, till its sails looked no larger than the sea-gulls that flew past her, and the busy day of the young summer awoke all round the semicircle of the bay, then, only then, Idalia moved and left the ivy-sheltered casement. From the glittering stretch of the azure seas, as from the thoughts newly arisen in her, she turned, with a pang of pain, with a throe of regret, the bitterness of pride repelling weakness, the bitterness of pride warring with remorse.

CHAPTER XX.

"MORE GREAT IN MARTYRDOM THAN THRONED AS CÆSAR'S MATE."

At the Prince of Viana's villa in the interior there was a masquerade; brilliant, gorgeous, like the splendid *feste* of medieval Italy, of Venice in its Dandolo glory, when the galleys swept home with the rich Byzantine spoils; of Florence while Isabel Orsini was in her loveliness, and the Capello beamed her sunny fatal smile, and even grave Machiavel sauntered well amused through the festive Gardens of Delight, when the Embassies of the Ten came in their purple pomp, or the City of Flowers laughed through endless mirth and music. The fête was very magnificent at the palace at Antina, given by lavish princely hands that scattered their gold right and left, and vied with the Grammont and the Doria brilliance away yonder in old

Rome. That at it other masks were worn than those black Venetian ones of pleasure, that beneath the swell of the music words of menace and danger were exchanged, that the domino was only donned that the sword might be surely drawn hereafter, that under the dewy orange-boughs, and beside the starlit waters and on the marble stairs, and under the light exchange of frivolous wit, intrigues were woven and dark plans made perfect,—these no more disturbed the gayety and the glory of the Antina masquerade than such had disturbed the laughing tide of festivities in Venice, or the garden fêtes of the Tuscans in the Cinque Cento. Rather they suited and enhanced it; it was in Italy, and they made it but the more Italian. It was the dagger of Sforza glancing beneath the Arlechino spangles and colors of Goldoni. Whoso cannot understand this mingling—the laugh and the arlequinade as really joyous as the steel and the stroke are surely subtle—can never understand the Italy of the Past: perhaps not the Italy of the Present.

Around one the maskers gathered with passing homage, around one the groups were more eager, more sedulous, more vivacious in their wit, more earnest in their undercurrent of political discussion than round any other; for on the elegance of the azure domino was the well-known badge of the Silver Ivy, that rallying symbol which brought to her all the lovers and the vassals of Idalia. She reigned there, as she had reigned wherever her foot fell, since the day eight years before, when she had left the leafy shadows and the yellow corn-lands of Sparta to come out to this world of mystery, intrigue, romance, danger, and pleasure, which she had made so wholly her own.

It has been said, "Every woman is at heart a Bohemian." Idalia was one to the core, all proud and patrician though she was. The excitement and the peril of her life, with its vivid color and its changing chances, she would not have exchanged for the eternal monotony of the most perfect calm; not even when she most utterly loathed, most utterly rebelled against the bondage which had entered in with the life she pursued. She was weary with herself often for the evil that she had done, she hated with an intense hatred the chains that had wound them-

selves round her freedom-loving, liberty-craving nature; but all the same, once plunged into the whirlpool of the dangers she directed, of the excitations she enjoyed, Idalia would not have laid them down and left them—left her scepter and her peril—without a pang bitter as that which tears life out, without a lingering and unbearable regret. It is false philosophy to say that those who have been once launched on a career which bears them now in the sunlight, now in the storm-shadow; now high on laughing waves of pleasure, now low sunk down under black bitter waters, varying ever, yet ever full of a tempestuous delight, of a headlong risk, of an abundant luxuriant glow and intensity of life, will ever willingly return to the dull flow of tideless and uncheckered streams. They may in moments of exhaustion fancy that they would willingly take the patience and the monotony of serene unnoted lives—human nature will ever at times, be it in king or peasant, turn from what it has to sigh for what it has not;—but it is only fancy, and a passing one;—they would never for a second make it a reality.

Thus it was with Idalia now; remorse haunted her, captivity in a sense galled her with terrible fetters; often she hated herself and hated those around her; yet once in the vortex of the intrigues and the ambitions which had so long possessed her, she forgot all else. Thus she forgot all save them here at the Antina masquerade. It was not that she was changed; it was not that her other impulses were not vitally and deeply true; it was simply that the dominant side of her character now came into play, and the love of power that was in her usurped its ancient sway.

Moreover, here, though she scorned and abhorred many of the companions and tools that the cause necessitated and employed, the cause itself was a pure and lofty one; one for which her will could never slacken, her love never grow cold;—it was the freedom and the indivisibility of Italy.

This was in the hearts, often on the lips, of all those tonight at Antina; amid the music, the laughter, the wit, the balmy air breathed over a million flowers, with the melodies of nightingales' tender throats. and the flash of

fire-flies among the groves of myrtle, and in the endless reception-chambers, with their jasper and their onyx, their malachite and their porphyry, stretching onward till the eye was lost in the colonnades of pillars, in the flood of light, in the sea of color. It was a scene from the Italy of the Renaissance, from the Italy of the Cinque Cento, from the Italy of Goldoni, of Boccaccio, of Tullia d'Arragona, of Bembo, of Borgia;—but beneath it ran a vein of thought, a stream of revolution, a throb of daring that gave it also a memory of Dantesque grandeur, of Gracchan aspirations, of Julian force: "One Italy for the Italians!" vibrated through it; an echo, though a faint and distant one, of the ancient challenge, "The whole earth for the Romans."

Suddenly through the glittering gayety of the masquerade, the magnificence of the princely banquet, the mirth of the Neapolitan revelries, an icy whisper ran; it was vague, unformed; it died half spoken upon every lip, yet it blanched the boldest blood; it was but one sickening, shameful, accursed word—"*betrayed!*"

The music ceased, the laughs hushed, there was a strange instantaneous pause in all the vivacious life, filling the palace and the gardens with its color and its mirth; there was such a lull as comes over sea and land before the breaking of the storm. Men looked in each other's faces with a terrible dread responsive in each other's eyes; glance met glance in a mute inquiry; friend gazed at friend in a wild search for truth, a bitter breathless thought of unmeasured suspicion; there was a chill, black, deadly horror over all—none knew whom to trust. On the stillness that had succeeded the music, the laughter, and the festivity, sounded dully the iron tread of heavily armed men; where the golden fire-flies glistened among the leaves, glistened instead the shine of steel; on the terraces and far down the gardens gleamed the blades of bayonets, the barrels of musketry; the earth seemed in a moment to grow alive with swarming men, and bristling with leveled weapons; gendarmes filled the piazza and the courts; the soldiers of Francis were upon them. There was an instant's silence so intense that the murmur of the bubbling fountains alone reigned in it; then with a

shock like thunder the bold blood of the sons of liberty, growing desperate, threw them in headlong violence unarmed upon their foes. Little avail; the solid line of steel was drawn around, with not an inch unfilled; they were hemmed in and caught in the toils.

Carlo of Viana, with his careless eyes alight like a lion's in its wrath, tore down from where it hung a keen Damascus sword, placed amid a stand of curiously wrought and antique arms, and strode over the mosaic pavement to one of his guests, whose azure domino was broidered and fastened with wreaths of silver ivy.

His voice shook as he stooped to her ear.

"Madame—Idalia—this is more for you than us. Follow me at once; there is a secret passage that no living creature knows besides myself; I can save you—I *will* save you!"

"I thank you deeply. But—I shall not fly from them!"

"My God! Not fly? Do you not know that if you are taken——"

Her lips might be a shade whiter, but her voice had no hesitation as she answered him:

"My fate will not be worse than others; whatever is theirs, I share."

Carlo of Viana drew the broad blade with a ringing echo from the sheath:

"Mother of Christ, then, we will defend you while life is in us!"

At that very moment the storm broke, the tumult began; the gay maskers fled in from the terraces and gardens like sheep driven wild by a wolf-dog; the banqueters seized the antique weapons, the weighty candelabra, the bronzes, the toy daggers—all and anything that would crash through like iron, or be hurled like stones; the double lines of steel drew closer, and filled in every aperture, blocked every door of egress; an officer advanced to the center of the great arch that spanned the entrance of the first reception-room, and addressed the Prince himself:

"Eccellenza, in the King's name I demand your unqualified submission, and your surrender to me of all suspected persons—notably, first, of the notorious revolutionist known by the title of the Countess Vassalis."

For all answer, with a mighty oath that rang through all his banqueting-chambers, Viana lifted his arm, and whirled in a flashing arc above his head the bright blade of the Persian steel;—Idalia bent forward with a swift gesture, which caught his wrist, and arrested the saber in its downward course; then, turning to the King's officer, she removed her Venetian mask, and looked at him calmly.

"If it will spare the shedding of innocent blood, you know me now."

For one moment there was a dead silence—the hush of speechless surprise, of speechless admiration; the emotion of a passionate love, of a passionate pride, in and for her filled the hearts of her own people with an agony of homage and of grief; the soldiers of the Bourbons were arrested for the instant, paralyzed and confounded as they looked on her, fronting them with a proud serenity, a dauntless, tranquil contempt, with the light on her diamond-bound hair. Then, as the officer of the Palace troops advanced to arrest her, his soldiers drawn closer and firmer round the banqueting-hall, the shouts of "Viva l'Italia!" "Viva la liberta!" shook the walls with the roll of thunder; a hundred who would have died at her feet to save a dog of hers from injury threw themselves round her as in a guard of honor; driven to bay, the lovers of freedom, the haters of tyranny, were ready to perish, shot down like hunted beasts, rather than ever yield. Carlo of Viana flung himself in the van, his saber flashing above his head; the gay and splendid dresses of the maskers, glittering in the light, seemed to heave and toss like a sea of color; they circled her like gardes du corps; their improvised weapons, torn from the tables, from the cabinets, from the walls, whirled in the radiance that burned from innumerable lamps. Idalia's eyes gleamed with such fire as might have been in the eyes of Artemesia when she bore her prow down on the Persian; of Antonina when she pierced the armies of the Goths, holding watch and ward to sack Imperial Rome; of Boadicea when she led the Iceni on to the fasces and the standards of the conquering legions. She would have given herself to save them; but since they, with or without her, must be doomed, her whole soul rose responsive to the challenge of danger, to the defiance of submission.

Her glance beamed on them with a superb light; sign of fear, thought of terror, there were none on her; she stood unmoved, the center of that tossing ocean of color, of steel, of floating dominoes, of leveled pistols, and glanced at Viana with a glance that thrilled him like flame and made him drunk like wine.

"Right! If they must take us, let us be dead first!"

As touchwood to the flash of fire, their blood and their wills answered her bidding; with a single sweep of his arm Viana felled down the commander who faced him, in a stroke that cleft straight through bone and brain; it was the signal of a life-and-death resistance. With a yell of fury, the soldiers closed in; a single voice from one unseen rose clear above the din.

"Reserve your fire, cut those carrion down like straw, and capture her alive!"

The voice was the voice of supreme command; officers and troops alike obeyed it; it was the mellow clarion tone of Giulio Villaflor, if the Priest of Peace could be the chief of such an errand. With bayonets fixed, in ranks three deep, pressing steadily through the courts and chambers, the soldiers of Francis bore down on the band of the maskers. Not a man wavered as the pointed file of steel pressed toward them: their masks flung aside, lest in that moment of supreme danger any should deem them guilty of the wish to hide beneath disguise, their right arms lifted, their brave faces set, the Revolutionists waited the approach of the Royalists—waited till there was scarce a foot's breadth between their circle and the naked blades leveled against them. Then, with a marvelous unison, as she raised her hand, they launched themselves forward, Viana in their van, and the weapons with which the haste of extremity had armed them fell with furious strength and lightning speed crash down on the ranks of the soldiers. Strange weapons—the embossed barrels of old Florentine arquebuses, the butt-ends of toy ivory pistols, the bronzed weight of lifted statuettes, the gold-handled knives of the banquet-tables, the massive metal of Cellini vases, the arabesqued steel of medieval rapiers, anything, everything that could have been torn down in the moment, from the art-treasures round, were hurled—as stones are hurled from

a barricade, down on the advancing troops of the king with mighty force, with tremendous issue. The Bourbon legionaries reeled and wavered under that pitiless storm, that fell like thunder-bolts upon them; more than one swayed back stone dead as the bronze or gold missile of some statuary or amphora felled him to the ground. Forbidden to fire, they hesitated dismayed before that terrible band of revelers turned to warriors, of maskers changed to foemen, of idle laughing wits and dancers grown desperate as men who fought for more than life. The Royalists recoiled; they were chiefly mercenaries of various nations; they could not front the blazing glance, the tiger-swoop, the proud, passion-heated scorn, the fearless menace of Italian nobles and Italian patriots. From the gloom of the night without, the same clarion voice rolled, clear as a bell's, merciless as a Nero's.

"Cowards! perdition seize you. Advance and fire on them."

It was a strange battle-field!—the beautiful ball-room and banqueting-halls of Antina. It was a strange battle-scene!—the circle of the dominoes like a ring of many colors were belted round the form of Idalia like guards around their menaced queen; the dead men were lying with their blood slowly welling out over the rich mosaics and the velvet carpets; the soldiers of the Throne had halted in a broken line, the light that had been lit for the gayeties of the masquerade was shining on carnage and on combat; the splendors of the palace were stretching out and away beyond aisle on aisle of porphyry columns, through circle on circle of rose-wreathed arches, while without, through the marble pillars of the piazza, were the silver silence of the night and the shadows of innumerable forms gathering closer and closer to seal all hope from those who fought for liberty.

There was a sharp, sudden, ringing clash as the bayonets were withdrawn and the rifles leveled; not one in the circle swerved or grew the paler; their eyes, steady but full of flame like a lion's at bay, looked down the mouths of the musketry. Idalia stood tranquil; and as they saw the serene disdain in that royal glance, the unwavering courage on that rich and haughty loveliness, the troops of

the king paused involuntarily. They *dared* not fire on her.

The voice from the gardens rang imperiously through the stillness.

"Dastards! you shall be shot down with them. Fire!"

The last word was not for the halting and paralyzed soldiers of the front; it reached farther, to where, unseen and massed in countless numbers, the picked men of Francis's Guard had marched noiselessly through the opposite doors of the banqueting-room, and circled the band of patriots in the rear with an impassable barrier, meshing them in one net beyond escape. They had not heard, they had not seen, they knew nothing of the ambuscade behind them, where they stood gathered around Idalia, facing their foes and holding them back by the menace of their eyes, as men hold back wild beasts, in gallant and dauntless chivalry, willing each one of them to lay down their lives that night rather than yield her up in passive cowardice to her foes. They never saw, they never heard —behind them stole the murderous tread, filling up the rear of the lofty hall with rank on rank of soldiers. Then suddenly, as the word to fire rang in its merciless command from the outer court, the line of rifles belched forth its flame; the sullen roar of the shots echoed through the chamber, raking the glittering colors of the masquerade robes as the driving hail rakes the wheat and the flowers of a full corn-field. Shot down from the rear in that craven murder, they fell, the balls in their breasts or their temples—a fourth of them leveled low; yet not a moan, not a cry escaped one of them, not a prayer for pity broke from the lips wet with their life-blood, not a sigh of agony escaped those whose nerves were rent, whose bone was shattered, whose lungs were pierced by that dastardly masked attack. Not a cry, not a supplication, broke even from Idalia, as the crash of the firing rolled over the devoted band that guarded her. Not for the first time did she look on bloodshed, nor for the first time meet the likeness of her death; but as they fell downward at her feet, stricken like felled trees, a mortal anguish came into her fearless eyes; she stretched her arms out less with entreaty than command.

"Spare them! To save them, I will surrender."

"By Christ, not for ten thousand lives!" cried Carlo of Viana, where he stood out of the deadly press, his reeking sword held aloft before her. "Surrender you! They shall only take you when we all lie dead around you!"

She grasped his arm and looked up in his face: there was no more of fear, no more of shrinking, than there were on his own; only in her eyes a superb heroism, on her lips a passionate entreaty.

"Serve me better still, my noble friend! Turn your sword *here*."

The tumult was at its height; emboldened by the fate of those shot down from the rear, the Royalists of the front pressed in. Wedged between two barriers, the patriots fought with mad despair, with lion courage. Where Viana stood, pausing one instant as she turned and made her prayer to him, he looked down into her eyes with an agony far greater than her own. He knew that death were sweeter far to her than the fate that would await her from her foes; he knew that she had in her the courage of Lucretia, the force of the wife of Pætus; but to slay with his own hand that perfect loveliness, to destroy with his own steel the pulse of that splendid and gracious life!—he drooped his head with a shudder, "*I cannot!*"

Scarcely had the words left his lips when the blade of a bayonet pierced his lungs; he fell like a mighty cedar lightning-stricken, not dead, but dying fast. The roar of the combat, the ring of the shots, the tumult of the conflict, as the betrayed were pressed between the wedge of the Royalist van and rear, were filling his palace-chambers with their riot and their anguish; he knew no more of sight, or sound, or life. He only looked up with blind eyes, that, through their mists, vainly and solely sought for one; his lips parted with a murmur, "Idalia!—Italy!" Then, with those names his latest thought, a shiver shook him as the red blood streamed through all the laces and the silks, the violet and the silver and the jewels of his dress, and, with one other deep-drawn, lingering sigh—he died.

She sank beside him on her knees, and her own danger and the conflict of the night that raged in its fiery struggle,

its mortal misery, around, died from her memory, and grew dull upon her sense. She only remembered the man who lay here at her feet—dead; dead through the love he bore her, dead through the creeds she had breathed in him; dead for her and by her, as though her hand had slain him.

The fearless grandeur faded from her face, that had been there throughout all chance of her own death; it grew white and cold, and fixed; a tearless grief, a burning remorse, were in her eyes, which only saw that crimson stream of flowing blood staining the tesselated floor, and that brave, bold, serene face turned upward to the light of million lamps studding like stars the vault of the dome above.

"Let them take me," she thought, "it is just. What am I better than a murderess?"

From the gloom of the outer court rang once more the voice of command.

"Seize *her!* You can choke the dogs of rebels at your leisure."

She never heard the pitiless clarion of those clear tones; she never felt the hiss of the balls past her; she never saw the ghastly conflict that filled the palace festive chambers with its clamor and its carnage, as men armed strong with the weight of tyranny and law pressed down on men who fought for liberty, for conscience, for their land, and for their lives. She thought only of the dead who lay around her.

Two officers of the guard, obedient, stooped and laid their grasp upon her; the action roused her from the unconscious stupor with which she knelt beside the lifeless limbs; she shook them off and rose facing them, still with that remorse in her tearless eyes, though on her face were a scorn and a daring which held those whom she threw off at bay as surely as the most desperate resistance of shot or steel.

She glanced down the hall, under the dome of the light-studded ceiling that stretched over so vast an area, of all which had been a few brief moments before filled with music and mirth and the murmur of laughing voices. She took no heed of those who had sought to seize her, but her eyes gazed with an infinite yearning out on her defenders

holding that unequal life-and-death struggle between the closing barriers of bayonets, and her voice echoed, clear and eloquent, yet with a music that thrilled the hearts even of her enemies.

"My friends—my friends!—lose no more for me. Death is liberty, but it cannot be mine; give me no other murdered lives to lie heavy on my own. Save yourselves by surrender, by flight, how you can, and think no more of me. The future will yet avenge us all."

The voice of the chief in command rang down again from the dusky shadows of the piazza.

"Soldiers! seize and silence her. She speaks sedition."

The officers, gentler than he who hounded them on to their work, stooped, hesitating, to her.

"You surrender?"

She looked at them with a look that for the moment flashed back all the proud contemptuous light upon her face, and lit in her deep eyes the glow of the old heroism.

"If the carnage cease."

The voice from the outer courts answered her, imperious and unyielding—

"We make no terms with revolutionists and rebels."

"I make no peace with tyrants and assassins."

Her return-defiance challenged her unseen foe with a calm grandeur; she stood above the fallen dead as some prophetess of Israel, some goddess in the Homeric age, might have stood above the slain, and called down vengeance.

From the darkness of the piazza a hot and heavy oath broke through the clamor.

"Yield! or we will deal with you as we deal with men."

A smile of utter unspeakable scorn passed over her lips —scorn for the cowardice that could threaten her thus— scorn for the craven temper that could deem death so victorious a menace.

She looked down tranquilly on the gleaming barrels of the rifles, and as her lover, in the far Carpathian Pass, had given the word for his own death-shot, so she gave hers now. Her eyes rested steadily on the Royalists.

"Fire!"

The soldiers of the King gazed at her, then dropped

the muzzles of their muskets slowly downward and downward; they hung their heads, and their eyes fell, while from one to another ran a sullen rebellious murmur,

"*Non possiamo!*"

There was an instant's intense stillness once more; the tumult ceased, the clamor died away, the uplifted steel sank, the iron grip relaxed; aggressors and defenders, revolutionists and royalists, alike were mute and awed before the courage of one woman. Then, with the fury of a mighty oath, a fresh command was hissed in its ferocity from the garden gloom, where the chiefs looked on into the courts and chambers.

"Make her captive, dead or living!"

There were ruffians in that Royal Guard, brigands of the Abruzzi, mountaineers of Calabria, who had imbrued their hands in innocent blood, and knew no check upon their crimes, though they would mutter Aves for their black and poisonous souls like any nun before her crucifix. These heard but to obey. They launched themselves upon her; they flung themselves through the press to seize her; their swords flashed naked above her head, their ravenous eyes fed gloatingly upon her jewels and her beauty; their brutal hands stretched ruthlessly to grasp and crush the gold of the shining hair, the mould of the delicate limbs, the fairness of the transparent skin; their gripe was on her shoulder, their breath was on her bosom. With the horror, and the grace, of outraged dignity, Idalia shook their hold from her, and drew herself from the loathsome insult of their villainous contact; her eyes shone with the luster of a passionate scorn, her voice mellow, imperious, unshaken, rang outward to the terrace where her tyrants herded.

"I surrender!—not to escape death, but to escape the pollution of your touch."

CHAPTER XXI.

"THE DEVIL TEMPTED ME, AND I DID EAT."

In the Neapolitan palazetto, which was the residence of Victor Vane, the light of the summer morning made its way through half-closed blinds, the odors of orange and myrtle were heavy to oppression on the air, the waters beat a lulling measure below, at the foot of the little pier; it was still, soft, indolently charming, slumberously restful in the noontide hush; yet he himself—commonly so calm, so languid, so supreme an artist in the science of lazy pleasures—had no repose in it or in his own life. He was pacing up and down the chamber that opened on the terrace with a restless impatience, a feverish irritation with all things that were about him. He drank down some claret fresh from the ice; it seemed to have no coolness in it; he twisted some grapes asunder, and they seemed to parch his mouth; he smoked an opium-filled narghilé, and flung the tube away with a curse; the nicotine had lost its charm, and irritated where it was wont to soothe; then he flung himself down on a couch, with his head dropped on his hands, and sat there immovable many moments, with a quick shudder running through his limbs, and the silence about him like a dead intolerable weight. For now that his work was done he loathed it; now that he had betrayed her, he could have killed himself; now that he had given her over to captivity and torture, he was haunted, and wrung, and maddened with the thoughts that forever pursued him. Yet—he would not have undone it if he could; he would not have foregone his revenge had it been in his power; since she was denied to him, he loved to know that she suffered, that she had pain, and fetters, and shame, that she would live to wish she had listened to his love, and to feel the cost of having mocked him and repulsed him.

She had refused him all the sweetness of passion; he

would not have loosened his hand on its vengeance. Since she could never be his, let her lose all likeness of herself, and perish as she might! There was fierceness enough in him to feel that ruthlessly; there was sufficient savageness in him beneath the polish of the world and the serenity of his egotism to be eager—thirstily and brutally eager—to know that what was beyond his reach, what he sought vainly, what he desired unavailingly, would be scourged, and defaced, and insulted, and shut out from all place on the earth. And yet, though he had given her up to her suffering, and would not, had he owned the power now, have released her from one pang of it, he suffered himself—suffered a torture not less than that to which he had delivered her. He knew the doom that would be hers under the revenge of a Church and a State so bitterly incensed against her; he knew that the net which had inclosed her would never unloose to let her issue with her life; he knew that if she ever came forth from the captivity into which he had betrayed her, it would only be when bondage, and stripes, and the companionship of infamy, and the approach of age, would leave no trace on her of all which she once had been; he knew—for against them all his hatred had been borne and his skill arrayed—the full meaning of the tyrannies of Bourbon and of Rome; and there were times when his passion endured agonies at the memory of the scourge that would cut the fairness of her skin, of the rough hands that would unveil her beauty, of the jail-ruffians who would strip the delicate raiment off her limbs, of the villainous glances that would gloat unchecked on her fallen loveliness. Mercy he had none; such love as he had borne her was of the character to change into a relentless and envenomed hate; but it was passion still, and there were times when the thought of her yielded up to her adversary's will, and buried forever beneath the stones of a dungeon-vault, drove his own revenge back into his heart, and tortured him not less than that revenge could her. Moreover, he had betrayed her; he had sold her into the hands of her foes, and though the subtle art of silken treachery had long been a science in whose proficiency he took his highest pride, there was manhood and there was dignity enough in him to make his

forehead burn with a red flush of shame when there rose in remembrance before him the haughty, radiant challenge of her eyes, and to make him long to know her dead in her youth, so that those eyes should never be turned on him in accusation and rebuke.

"Great Heaven!" he muttered in his teeth, where he lay with his head sunk on his arms, "if she would only have *believed* I loved her?"

That was the one misery which had goaded him on to his crime. For once in his life he had been in earnest; for the sole time, from his boyhood up, an emotion genuine, however alloyed, had risen in him. In what he had felt for Idalia he had been true, with a truth he had never known before; for her he would have become anything that she had bidden him; to win her he would have endured and achieved all tasks she could have pointed out; and in the single hour in which this sincerity and this reality had possessed him, his own skeptical mockery had recoiled on him in hers; he had been powerless to induce her to hear one beat save that of egotism in his heart; he had been powerless to make her credit one throb of love or loyalty in him. That she should have rejected him he would have pardoned her; that she *disbelieved* him was the iron which went so far down into his soul, and changed every desire in him into one cruel thirst—the thirst for his vengeance and for her destruction. She had contemptuously doubted the force of his love. Well! he had said in his teeth that she should feel that force—feel it in the weight of fetters, in the burden of ignominy, in the oppression of dungeon solitude—feel it till she cursed the day that ever she braved it and mocked at it.

Awhile ago, and he would have laughed in the beard of any man who should have told him that such barbaric folly, such desert passions as these, could ever blind and rule him. Now he never resisted their sway, but let them burn out his strength and consume his intellect as they would. There were times when he shook opiates into his wines with a hand that recked little whether it shook too little or too much, and would have poured out a death-dose without a tremor; times when ambition seemed worthless as autumn leaves, and he loathed life because life could

never yield to him the beauty of one woman. All who once loved Idalia drank of a madragora that left them little of their natures, nothing of their wisdom. Even he had no antidote against it, but let it steal away his brain and pour its fire through his limbs till the soft courtier grew a brute, till the subtle politician became a fool, till the gentleman turned a traitor.

A sound in one of the many chambers leading off from the terrace-room in which he was, roused him. He was still too much governed by long habit and discipline not to recover himself instantly. Whatever he felt was only given way to in loneliness; no looker-on could see any change in his delicate, immutable face, in his soft calm smile, in his easy velvet indolence; he would have profited little by his long study of the world if he could not have held his own in finesse to the last.

Into the apartment with little ceremony and no apology, Conrad Phaulcon came. His disguise was perfect. He was used to assume one at any hour and for any need; and in the dress of a melon-seller, with his fair skin stained and his auburn beard dyed black, his closest friend might have passed him by, his sworn foe failed to challenge him. He neither paused to watch nor ask if his host penetrated the mask as he swept up toward Vane, his mobile mouth working, and his large brown eyes aflame.

"Is this true?"

Victor had known him before he had heard his voice, and was on his guard. He shrugged his shoulders where he leaned against the side of the vine-shadowed window.

"You incarnate volcano; you will destroy us all some day! An ostensible melon-seller forcing his way in to me in this fashion! Have you ever stopped to remember what the household can think?"

"Felix admitted me, and I gave him the pass-word. But, answer me, for God's sake, what of Idalia?——"

"What of her? Why, this of her, caro, that she is the subject for a tragic study by that eminent artist Monsignore Giulio Villaflor, to which you will form a companion picture if you trust to a basket of melons to pass you unnoticed through Naples."

The words were quite cool, quite unstudied, with just

enough of regret in their half-languid banter to keep them from being mockery. Phaulcon's fine frame shook passionately as he heard; under the olive dye his cheek grew ashen; he threw himself down and sobbed like a child, wept as if his heart would break, in uncontrolled emotion.

His friend stood looking at him some moments in silence with a certain impatient disdain. This Greek, handsome as an Apollo, cruel at times as a Nero, and stained deep with many a crime, was yet as a child in the sight of the more controlled and astute Englishman; a child in cowardice, in impulsiveness, in caprice, in tyranny, in emotion, with all a child's unguardedness, recklessness, mobility, and love of torture.

"Naturally, you regret!" he said, at last, very softly. "You have not even killed your goose with the golden eggs yourself, my poor Conrad, but see bird and gold both stolen at a blow! Very naturally, you regret!"

The silken irony, the mockery of pity, stung Phaulcon like a shot. He started up, dashing the waves of his hair out of his eyes, while great drops of dew stood on his forehead.

"Can you credit me nothing better than that?"

"Caro mio, how can I credit you with anything better than caring for money? It is the one prudential virtue which the world *does* crown!"

The Greek's teeth crushed his silken beard, while his features quivered with the vivid, uncontrolled emotion of his changing temperament.

"I am not thinking of her wealth; I think of *her*—of my own sins to her, of her beauty, of her genius, of her life."

His voice sank in a deep sob; he spoke but the truth for the moment; he thought for the instant not of himself, but of Idalia; not of his own danger, not of his own loss, but of her torture. He loved her in his wayward, tyrannous way; and for awhile the love alone remained with him.

"She is in the power of Villaflor!" he said, fiercely. Remorse was in him, and remorse made him long to wreak some savage vengeance somewhere; he would have little cared how or on whom.

"They say so. You know as much as I do. It has been a terrible blow to us; to keep quiet, and cover as much as we can, is all we shall be able to do. There was great carnage at Antina, and the arrests swept off all the musketry spared—among them your Countess. Indeed, she was doubtless the chief object of all."

"Where have they taken her?"

He spoke in his throat. At that moment he would have rather had a hundred balls fired into his own breast than have heard this of the woman he had so pitilessly chained and tormented.

"*Poverino!* how can we tell? It is not the fashion of the court to disclose its secrets, nor of Monsignore to let profane eyes see where his nets are spread."

His voice was unmoved, and almost careless, though it wore a natural gravity of regret, but in his heart he endured an agony greater than that of the man before him; the thought crossed him, to what fate would the Prince-Bishop devote a captive of the sex and the years and the charms of the prisoner he had betrayed to him?

Phaulcon's hand clinched; the muscles of his throat and chest, where the loose shirt of the *contadino* left them to view, swelled to bursting. Idalia was his treasury, his sovereignty, his world, his scepter; without her he was nothing; of her he had made with a twisted mixture in him of fear and homage, of tyranny and weakness, of hate and love, an empress who to him alone out of all the earth was a slave, an enchanted wand with which he summoned what he would, an idol that he treated as hunters treated their statue of Pan when they reviled him because they needed more wealth than he gave, and yet feared him with a strange mingling of dread, of reverence, and of jealous love.

"Villaflor?" he repeated hoarsely. "That Satan of the Church? Better she had gone at once to her death. Are you sure? How can you know?"

Vane had let slip in a momentary incaution the name of his great priestly confederate; he veiled the indiscretion with his finest tact.

"How can I doubt?" he said, with an acrid impatience that passed well enough for aversion to a mutual and om-

nipotent foe. "Was Giulio Villaflor ever absent from such errands as those? Did his brain ever fail to hatch such plots as those by which the maskers of Antina were entrapped, however little his hand might be seen, or his will be guessed in them? His special hatred always bore down on the Countess Vassalis; there is no more doubt that he works beneath this, if he do not wholly originate and govern it, than there is doubt that the sun is shining out yonder."

Phaulcon swore a mighty oath in his teeth as his lips shook, and his face flushed purple.

"If he harm her, I will find my way into his palace and drive a dagger down his throat, though he stand at the altar itself!"

"*Carissimo!* what would that avail, except to have you hanged, or disposed of in a still less humane fashion? Be reasonable. Tragedy will avail nothing. If you killed Villaflor, there would remain a score of monsignori to take his place and play his cards. The arrest of Madame de Vassalis is a terrible stroke for us—we could better have afforded to lose fifty men than to lose your irresistible Idalia; at the same time we shall not better her, and we shall surely imperil ourselves and all our projects, if we go like men in a melodrama, slaying priests and calling on the gods for vengeance."

"What! You would have us stand calmly by in inaction while she may be—may be——" The words choked him; he knew what the power of Giulio Villaflor meant to all, meant above all to a woman.

"Inaction! What action can you suggest?"

The Greek was silent; his swift thoughts swept far over a thousand schemes that rose only to bear with them the sentence of impossibility.

"I—as eagerly as yourself—would be the first to try all things, and to risk much in the service of the Countess Vassalis," pursued Vane, with the soft, even, almost unnatural calm which he had held throughout his interview with the Roman prelate. "But, frankly, I see nothing that is to be done with any sort of benefit. To penetrate the secrets of the government will take time, and, what we have very little of, money; to avow ourselves her parti-

sans will be only at once to share her imprisonment and be lodged in the casemates yonder; to attempt a rescue requires the one thing we do not possess—knowledge of where she has been taken. What remains? We are as helpless, so far as I can see, as if their chains were already about our limbs. There is nothing for it—yet at least—except to wait and watch."

Phaulcon sank down again, with his head drooped and his hands locked savagely one in another.

"You are right, I dare say," he said, bitterly; "and very cautious! But—you never loved her."

There was not even the flicker of an emotion, not the faintest flush on his companion's face; but a smile passed for a second over his listener's lips; he had not loved her; he whose thwarted love had betrayed her to her fate! The Greek's utter ignorance was almost ludicrous to him.

"Your heart and your conscience have come into sudden play, Conrad mio," he said, indolently. "I never knew before that you kept such old-world weaknesses; no one would have accused you of them!"

"Well! I have been guilty enough to her!" he answered, sullenly, with a dark-red flushing his cheek; he was ashamed of this better emotion, as the man he was with now had always made him ashamed of any purer or higher touch that lingered in him.

"It is rather late in the day to think of that!"

"Too late!—my God!"

A terrible remorse was on him, passing, fitful, evanescent, but very ardent, very contrite, while it was in its first poignancy, while he thought of the ghastly doom in which had closed the splendid life that he had made and marred, the career to which he had wooed and to which he had enchained the youth and the power and the genius of Idalia—a remorse in which he suffered acutely; in which the uncertainty and the peril of her unknown fate were tortures to him; in which he seemed very vile, very accursed in his own sight.

His friend looked on impatiently; it incensed him to see this callous, thoughtless, tyrannous, unscrupulous Greek moved by her danger thus; it made his own traitor-shame weigh heavier on his heart. He did not lose his self-com-

mand; but he spoke almost insolently, on the spur of the misery that he choked down out of sight.

"Your beautiful Countess is too fair for the scourge and the cell, there is no doubt of that. I dare say she will never be condemned to them. Giulio Villaflor has too good a taste for such dainty paintings to shut them in solitude; he will not be likely to let so rare a flower wither in a prison-court. Miladi Idalia has better coin to buy indulgence with than all the gold of Europe!"

In his own wretchedness it was a cruel relief to him to fling dishonor at the woman he had betrayed, and to torment the man whose self-acusing contrition made him feel more sharply his own baseness.

Conrad Phaulcon started up impetuously, with deadly blasphemies muttered under his breath, as he paced the chamber like a leopard lashed to fury.

"You do not know Idalia," he said, savagely. "She would die sooner——"

Vane laughed a flippant, nonchalant, silvery laugh.

"Oh, believe me, fair women are not so enamored of the ugliness of death; and—as for the rest—she has gone very far for the sake of public liberty; she will scarce grudge a good price for personal freedom. Not know Idalia? *Altro!* I don't think, with all your title to her confidence, that you know her very thoroughly yourself. Perhaps she will treat with Villaflor *de couronne à couronne.* We are playing a losing game; she will have the tact of her sex and go over to the stronger side. She is far more fit for courts than for conspiracies. She could make good terms, I have little doubt, and I would back her to match the bishop in subtlety,—I could scarcely give as much praise to any one else in Europe."

"You mean that——"

"That she will forsake us and coalesce with the royalties. All women are rakes at heart, as Pope says, and he should have given an alliterative line to it,—all women are royalists. They may talk liberalism, but they are Optimates to the core, and adore a despot, public or private. Madame de Vassalis will see herself in imminent danger; she will barter herself and her knowledge and her power to buy her emancipation. Not a doubt of it. She is a

republican; she is of the advanced school; she is '*of us*' —oh yes! but she is a woman of the world, a wonderfully clever one, too, and she will do what is expedient, and never die for a chimera."

He more than half believed what he said; he saw far into Idalia's character, but not far enough to fully gauge its depth. He had, moreover, a natural disbelief in the existence of any nature proof against a bribe, or capable of preferring a creed to a sovereignty. The Greek looked at him with fiery scorn.

"You think that? I tell you that, rather than play for one hour into the hands of King or Church, Idalia would suffer a hundred deaths. Her word is her bond, and treachery has no place with her; she will never buy liberty by a renegade's cowardice——"

"Sublimely virtuous, but—scarcely true, I fancy. Miladi is too world-wise to be an idealist."

He spoke carelessly; but such conscience as was in him, and all manliness that had not been polished away by the plane of sophism and of expediency, were pierced to the quick by the words that unwittingly stung him so closely.

"By-the-way," he went on carelessly, "I dare say that the Court, having snared her, would be willing to treat with you. What do you say, amico mio? You have not made a very good thing of Liberalism; would you try Absolutism for a time, and change the Phrygian bonnet for a Neapolitan coronet?"

"*I!*"

"Well—you. If they do not take you prisoner too, you may conclude very good terms just now, in all probability. Our party is bruised, but not killed. We have danger enough in us to render us worth bribing, though not strength enough to give us a straw's weight of success. Under the circumstances, you might make a very lucrative bargain. There is no reason on earth why a democratic *condittiero* like you, my good Conrad, should not be metamorphosed into a courtier and a son of the Church. What do you think of it?"

Phaulcon's eyes had fastened on him throughout his speech with a glistening light that he—he who had told the Prince-Bishop that he could buy this man at a ma-

ment's notice—had construed as the eagerness for change, for security, and for a costly bribe, of an avaricious and reckless adventurer. As he ceased, the Greek's rich voice broke across his final words like thunder.

"By Heaven, if I thought you spoke in earnest I would kill you where you sit! If I did such villainy as you hint at, I should deserve the shot or the steel that would find its way to me as surely as night follows day. *You* tempt me to such shame—you!"

Victor raised his hand with a slight warning gesture; the gesture that controlled his companion's tumultuous passions like a spell.

"Why not?—*to try you?* Frankly, I scarce gave you credit for such sublimated idealogy and self-devotion. Do you mean to say that you would rather swing or be shot by the Bourbons to-morrow than get a court place and an Italian title?"

He spoke with a contemptuous, incredulous insolence; he would as soon have expected Vesuvius to vomit gold and diamonds as to find anything like loyalty and probity in the man he dealt with—a man who checked at no crime, and knew no contrition.

The Greek flushed restlessly and painfully under the brown dye of his skin.

"Sneer as you will," he said, sullenly, "I have so much conscience in me, whether you believe it or not. I am vile enough, I dare say, but I am not so vile as *that.* There are few sins I have not plunged into, there is not one that I fear; but a renegade I never was yet, and never will be. By Heavens! if I felt myself turning traitor, if I thought that my strength would fail me to keep true, I would set the mouth of a pistol against my own head before my lips had time to dishonor me!"

In the moment he was true; in the moment the one higher thing in his nature asserted its domination; with all his falsity, his guilt, his ruthlessness, his baseness—and these were very black—he was loyal to an idea, he was faithful to a bond. He would betray others without a scruple, but he would not turn a traitor to his cause; he had so much still left of affinity with the codes and the freedom that he ostensibly served. It went far to redeem

him, all warped and erring though it was—went far to raise him above the higher intelligence and the finer subtlety of the man who tempted him.

Vane heard him with an acrid wrath; this madman, this tool, this wax in his hands, this guilt-stained adventurer, whom he thought no more of than he thought of any pistol that he could use as he would, full of danger to others, but to him a mere toy of wood and of steel, shamed him, stung him, escaped from him. What Conrad Phaulcon shrank from as too foul to stoop to must be foul indeed!

"I congratulate you on your new nobility, mon cher," he said, indolently, with that covert sneer which the Greek had learned to dread as a hound dreads the lash. "I did not know there was anything you *had* scruples about, but I am glad there should be;—it is a new experience! I take your assurances, however, *cum grano salis;*—you are quite wise to make them so fervently, seeing that, as you observed, a shot or a stab would follow your desertion as surely as night follows day. And now, you will allow me to remark that you are very imperfectly disguised, that you will involve me very disagreeably if you are discovered here, and that I shall thank you to remove yourself from Naples at once."

"But Idalia?"

"You can serve Idalia in nothing by putting yourself and every one else in jeopardy. The Church has her; the Church does not lightly let go its prey. All that can be done, you are sure, will be done——"

"But——"

Victor lifted his hand again; a very slight gentle movement, but before it the fiery impetuosity, the mutinous impatience, of the Greek fell into a soldier's submissiveness, a spaniel's docility. In their armies there were many ranks, but there was only one discipline—implicit obedience and silence unto death. If his chief had bidden him throw himself from the heights of Tiberio, Phaulcon would have cast himself headlong down without a question, when once they stood on the ground which that slight gesture warned him they were on now—the ground of authority on one side, of obedience on the other.

"Leave all to me. And for the present quit Naples

while you can—if you can. Go to the old quarters at Paris immediately, and there await instructions. Adieu!"

Phaulcon's eyes looked at him with a piteous entreaty; he did not speak, but the great muscles of his throat swelled and throbbed, and his nervous hands clinched; the mute appeal spoke better than any words his prayer against that merciless dismissal.

"Go, *caro*," said his tyrant, gently; but the gentleness was immutable and cold. "If you feel such tenderness for your fair Countess, you should not have drawn her into such dangerous paths. Make yourself easy; she can take care of herself; there are few men—and I doubt if Giulio Vallaflor be one of the few—who can match the wit and the science of La Vassalis. Now, go; your presence is embarrassing, and your melons are a blunder; but you always would be so impetuous! *Bon voyage;* and if the Bourbonists should stop you on the way, remember—and die mute. An unpleasant and discourteous allusion, I confess; but one must face possible contingencies."

Conrad Phaulcon looked at him one moment with a fierce glare under his curling lashes; but for the bond that bound and the authority that fettered him, he would have tossed up the Northerner's slender frame in his strong lithe arms, and dashed on the marble without those subtle astute brains that baffled and that ruled him. Then he dropped his head as a chidden hound drops his—and went.

Alone, his chief sat motionless, his eyes fixed, his arms resting on the table before him, his face white and rigid as though its profile were the profile of a marble bust. He had been bitterly stung, though he had never shown it; he had been deeply moved, though he had given no sign of it. This lawless tiger, this velvet-skinned wild brute, this worthless adventurer, this mountain-thief, who shot men as willingly as he shot sea-birds, had flung off treachery as a villainy too black for him; and he—a scholar, a gentleman, a wit, a man who ridiculed the barbaric errors of crime, and who knew that he had in him intellect to compass the statecraft of half a world—had found no issue for his ambitions, no crown to his career, no end for his attainments, except a traitor's shame! No rebuke from pure

or lofty lives would have made him feel his own degradation so deeply as the revolt of the man whose hardened guilt he had known so long, and whose scruples he had never before found check at any baseness that was offered him; the man in whom he had himself killed all remnant of better instincts, and whom he had looked on as a mercenary, to be hired at will for any infamy, by whichever side could bid the highest. No scorn from those of stainless honor or of blameless deeds could have cut him so unendurably as the contempt for his own sin of renegade betrayal which had flashed from the glance and lashed him in the words of the Greek, whom he had known steeled to all remorse and careless of all disgrace.

"Faugh!" he thought, with a disdainful bitterness that availed little to reconcile him to himself; "his is just such bastard honor, such childish folly, as we see a thousand times over in the most shameless scoundrels of Europe. The brigand murders at his fancy, and reverences a leaden saint in his hat; the brutes of the Abruzzi flay their prisoners, and pray to the Madonna; the soldiers of the Pope kill women and children as they would cut the throats of pigs, and tremble when their master blesses them on Easter day;—it is all over the world, that trash of superstition, that fit of spurious repentance, that ague-attack of poltroonery which men, because they are ashamed of it, dignify into conscience or creed! He would sell his soul to the devil if there were such a thing as a devil, and yet he prides himself on clinging to an idea which he has never followed except for the sake of adventure and self-interest, and to a cause which he has never embraced except as a vent for his own listlessness and discontent! And men call that king of straw, that random folly, that weakness cloaked in borrowed purples, *honor!*"

But the ironies that he wove to himself, the contempt in which he strove to steep and still the pangs of shame that Conrad Phaulcon's single virtue had awakened, had little potency. He was a gentleman, and the disgrace of his sin was as gall to him. Something of that humiliation and unendurable hatred for his own act which made Iscariot slay himself, finding no value in the silver pieces for whose glitter he had wrecked his peace and sold the guiltless,

smote even through the ice-mail of his graceful callousness, the steel cuirass of his worldly policies.

And—though cowardice had no place in him, as it had in the fiery but mobile temper of Phaulcon—a shiver ran through him as he thought of those words—"the shot or the steel that follows the renegade, as the night follows the day." He knew that they were no hyperbole, no metaphor; he knew that men who were false to the political Order of which they were sworn, died so by that Order's vengeance, almost as surely as darkness falls on the sun's setting—died with a dagger-stroke in the winter nights of Rome, a pistol-shot in the gay chambers of Paris, a blow from behind in the riotous carnival times of Venice; died wherever they were, struck by unerring hands, and knowing that it was but wild justice for their own Judas sin, though the world saw in their fall but some common street scuffle, some murder of continental lawlessness, some thief's assassination for a few gold coins.

He knew it, and a chill tremor passed over him as he mused. But a few months before, a sculptor had been found at the door of his studio in Rome with a great wound slashed across his breast, and the blood choking his voice, so that he died speechless. The talk of the day had drafted that death in among the deeds of violence that Roman thieves will deal in, and babbled of the insecurity of life under the Papal tenure, and of the sad fate of the young genius struck down for a few bajocchi on his own threshold. Victor Vane had been aware, as many like him also, that no Roman thief had been the dealer of that stroke home to the lungs as the sculptor felt his way up the dark winding staircase, whose blackness the oil flicker of a single lamp only rendered deeper gloom; but that it had been a pitiless vengeance for an oath taken in boyhood, and in manhood broken.

He knew it; wherever he went, whatever he did, howsoever high he rose in eminence, whatsoever fruitage he gathered from the seed of treachery, the possibility of that doom would pursue him, the dread of it would haunt him—a worse fate than the stroke itself, sharply and swiftly dealt. The sword would ever hang above his head wherever his banquet should be spread, whatever nobles and

princes should be summoned to it. Let him dupe his early comrades, or reign in his new sovereignties as he would, he could never dismiss this from him—this chance, that soon or late the vengeance for his desertion would search him out, and strike him in the hour of his surest security, of his proudest triumph.

Yet the step was taken; there was no receding now, and he knew that he had in him to rule empires if once he could grasp but the hem of power. He ground his teeth where he gazed down on the mosaic on which his arms rested, with the sharply-defined delicacy of his features, death-white in the golden sun-glow that fell through the broad leaves of vine.

"I was wrong to say there is no devil," he thought; "there is one that cripples the strongest and tempts the wisest, and sets the fool above the sage, and kicks genius into a hovel to die, and gives diadems to idiots, and makes great lives plod wearily for daily bread round the ass's mill, and in the ass's shafts; there is a devil that runs riot in the world, flinging all the prizes to the dullards who let them rust, and tossing all the blanks to the men who only want a chance to prove their mettle; there is a devil that leaves thrones to brainless dullards, and scratches out the winning blood from every race because it has no pedigree, that fills swine's troughs with pearls, and seals lips that drop eloquence; there is a devil that flings the wheat to the flames, and calls the chaff blessed bread, that lames the boldest ere they can start, and curses the new-born child in his cradle; there *is* a devil—the devil of Caste!"

When the failings of Democracy are hooted against her, one fair thing in her should be remembered—that in her sovereignties this one deadly bitterness, this passionate, poignant regret for all he *might have been*, had not Position warped, and cramped, and proscribed, and starved him, can come unto no man.

And there is no evil worse than this; for by it the man casts back on accident (and often with a terrible justice) all the errors, the failures, the sins, and the disgraces of his life. "I never had a fair field!"—it may be sometimes a coward's apology; but it is many a time the epitome of a great, cramped, tortured, wasted life, which strove like a

caged eagle to get free, and never could beat down the bars of the den that circumstances and prejudice had forged. The world sees the few who do reach freedom, and, watching their bold upward flight, says rashly, "will can work all things." But they who perish by the thousand, the fettered eagles who never see the sun; who pant in darkness, and wear their breasts bare beating on the iron that will never yield; who know their strength, yet cannot break their prison; who feel their wings, yet never can soar up to meet the sweet wild western winds of liberty; who lie at last beaten, and hopeless, and blind, with only strength enough to long for death to come and quench all sense and thought in its annihilation,—who thinks of them —who counts them?

Where he sat with his teeth clinched and the nerve of his lips twitching, the finished tactician cursed his fate as passionately as any Gilbert on his death-bed, any Mirabeau in his dungeon. A consuming passion was upon him; and under it his philosophies mocked and his worldly wisdom forsook him. It had made him a traitor; it made him now weak as any woman. While he had lightly laughed with a scoff of her sorcery over the Prelate, his heart had been sick with jealousy and dread. He had remembered too late what manner of man Giulio Villaflor was; what manner of ransom the voluptuous Churchman was likely to exact from such a captive as he possessed now. He had thought too late that, in yielding her up to her foe, he was delivering the woman he loved to one who would feel the spell of her beauty as utterly as he, and would be armed with the power to do with that beauty howsoever he would. So that he were revenged on her, he had never heeded how that vengeance might recoil. It smote him keenly now, as he mused on the amorous, ruthless, unscrupulous priest, to whom he had surrendered her.

In the power of Giulio Villaflor!—he turned hot and cold as the memory passed over him. He had delivered her into bondage, that she might be shut away from all eyes—that her smile might be seen of none—that what could not be his should be no other's—that the empire of her sorcery should end forever in a life of ignominy, of suffering, and of slavery. But now he shuddered where he

sat immovable, with the yellow light streaming down through the vine; he had given her over to one who never spared, to one who would look on her loveliness at once with the admiration of a voluptuary and the sway of a tyrant; to one who could offer her release from lifelong misery as the purchase coin of her love, or could take it, if denied, with the mailed grasp of an irresistible and irresponsible dominion.

It fascinated him with its very horror, it enchained him with its very torture, this thought which he had flung at the name of Idalia, to insult her and to taunt his companion, and which grew into a phantom that he could not exorcise, a vision that he could not drive away. Every second was horrible to him; he saw the sovereign grace, the proud glance of the woman he had betrayed; he saw the full lustrous eyes of the arrogant priest as they would be bent upon her; and he ground his teeth as under some bodily agony—he had dealt himself a sharper torment than any he had condemned her to endure. He had given her to bondage—yes, but he had given her also to Giulio Villaflor!

There are women who rouse a passion far more intense than can be held in the word love, which makes the man who feels it lose all semblance of himself, which sweeps away his memory, his honor, his reason, his ambitions, his very nature, and leaves him no sense of anything save itself. This was the passion which made her traitor now—cold, and keen, and subtle, and world-worn, and skeptical as he had been—choke down the great sobs in his throat, as he thought:

"Only to know her dead, so that no other can ever look on her; only to know that! Dead, dead, dead! she would seem mine then. And yet,—I should rifle her grave like the madman in legends, for one sight of her face, for one touch of her lips!"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CAPTIVE OF THE CHURCH.

In the interior stood a small castellated building flanked with towers of a singular solidity and strength, and casements built deep into the solid masonry, the narrow slits and dwarfed arches of the early centuries. The country round was dreary; marsh and osier bed, with the rushes turning from spring green to autumn hues as the season varied, and to the left, interminable olive-fields, bounded in the distance with a somber line of cypress, had little beauty, even when the southern sunset gave them its glow; and the place where the building stood, a black and broken pile of irregular rock, with a lake below, hemmed in by dark and stunted trees, lent only a deeper gloom and loneliness to the landscape. In the middle ages the towers had been a robber's stronghold, called the Vulture's Ages, and sorely feared by travelers; now, it was Church property, a few Cistercians held it as their convent, and, if it were ever used for other purposes, the slow swinging of the matins' bell, which dully droned over the desolate lands around, stilled all rumor of the fact.

A tempestuous sun was setting in the west; intense fire lighted for the moment all the rugged and monotonous expanse, flamed in the salt and sluggish waters of the tarn, and reddened all the arid desert of the parching turf. Through a lancet window it shone into a darkened barren room; the gray stone floor uncovered, the pine-wood walls as bare, and the meager furniture of a convent cell, the only things that garnished it. To and fro in the narrow limits paced, as a lioness may pace her den, Idalia. She was a prisoner of a King and of a Church—two jailers that never in any age have loosed their prey.

The hour had come that she had long foreseen must sooner or later be her fate; she was in the hands of foes whom but a tithe of all that she had done would have suf-

ficed to hound to their worst fury. Fear was not in her now; the blood of Artemesia and of Manuel was in her veins, and the fire of the Sea Queen and of the Imperial Soldier flamed too hotly and too proudly there to let dread enter. But a terrible chafing sense of utter impotence, a longing to dare, to defy, to vanquish, while she was here a captive, a fearful knowledge, a passionate regret for all that she had lost, for all she might have been, made the slow moments' torturing passage unendurable—made her hands clinch, her eyes flash, her whole frame quiver and rebel in mighty longing, in fearful bitterness.

She knew that she had in her what would have found power to rule an empire—and she was here the prisoner of a Priesthood!

But a more intense and a more poignant pang than that of her own adversity, of her own peril, was in her for other lives lost through her—for the manhood that had reeled and fallen at her feet, for the sightless eyes that had looked up to hers, for the dead, slaughtered through a too true adherence to her will, a too obedient rendering of her word. True, the liberty for which they had conspired was the just heritage of man, and the noblest cause for which human life can ever be laid down; true, it was for their country, and that country's welfare and freedom, that they had fallen; but this was no opiate to still the remorse that pierced and pursued her. She knew that the cause had been far less to those who had died before her than the smile of her own eyes; she knew that with her beauty, and her power, and her sorcery, she had wooed them to passion only to drive them there, by their fealty to her, to perish like netted stags. She knew that it had been through the beguilement of her own unsparing temptation, her own ruthless witchery of fascination, that those who had been murdered in the night just gone had entered on a career which, without her, they might never have embraced.

The very masked banquet at which they had been trapped and slain had been given through her, given for her, and turned by her to that end for which the soldiers of the king had shot them down as rebels. She knew that but for her they would be living now in the fullness of

their freedom and their manhood; and the remorse of an assassin seemed to weigh on her and haunt her, with the blood-red glow of that dying sun, in which the uplifted eyes of Viana, as they had sought hers through the mists of his last agony, seemed ever to gaze on her.

She was proud, she was daring, she was unscrupulous, she was self-controlled to a marvel, she was, as men counted, cruelly heartless; but in that moment Idalia could have doomed herself to the curse of any eternal travail of expiation—in that moment she could have rent out her living heart where it beat, and have flung it to the kites that hovered in the dusky glow of twilight as the vilest, darkest, most accursed thing that ever beat with life. She had the coldness of the world, and the pitiless serenity of one long used to study strong emotions only as tools to power; but beneath her acquired calm and cynic indifference the fervency of southern nations still slept in her, and she loathed herself with the fierce unsparing hatred with which men hate their direst foe.

She did herself injustice in much, and loaded herself with heavier reproach than that which had a right to rest on her; but it is ever thus with natures strong, bold, imperial, and used to command, when from the exercise of unmerciful dominion they change to the lash of self-rebuke and self-detestation; as kings in monastic days laid down the scepter and took up the scourge.

Of her own fate she scarce took a thought; she knew well enough that little mercy would mingle with it; but all her heart, all her mind, all her longing, were with those dead men who had perished for her, those noble and dauntless lives which had been struck down around her as though they had been murrained sheep. In her youth, in her beauty, in her wealth, in her supremacy, she was flung into captivity, and knew that endless imprisonment, if not the shame and labor of some still more humiliating torture, would be her doom, but no throb of pity was in her for herself; the only thought upon her was the thought of those whom she told herself that she had murdered.

The bolts of the cell were undrawn with a slow grating sound; she turned and faced the door; it opened, and Giulio Villaflor entered the chamber. The ruddy flame-

like light just fading in the west was shed full upon her; the mask dress she had worn had not been changed, and the diamonds on it flashed amid its scarlet, its black, and its gold; in her weary musings she had thrust back from her temples the masses of her diamond-crowned hair, and, though her face was very colorless and her eyes heavily circled, she had never looked more magnificent than she looked now, as she turned with an empress's challenge.

Villaflor, entering with the soft and courtly step of his habitual grace, started and paused, with a Roman oath murmured involuntarily in his surprise and his admiration. He had seen her in Paris, in Spain, in Vienna, but in that instant her loveliness literally struck him blind; he came to arraign a captive, and a queen faced him in haughty and silent disdain. Fluent, facile, a statesman and a churchman, a libertine and a courtier, he had for the moment no words; he was held in check by his own rebel prisoner.

She looked at him, and a slight smile of contempt passed over her face.

"Ah! I thought so!" she said calmly. "So *your* lambs were the wolves, holy father?"

The Prince-Bishop changed color ever so faintly; the sarcasm of the accent rather than of the words pierced his armor of omnipotence and self-love; he understood why men had dreaded the lash and the steel less than they had dreaded the lightest touch of this woman's scorn. But he was a powerful and accomplished personage, to whom defeat or opposition were heresies unknown; he recovered his momentary discomfiture, and came nearer to her, the warm after-glow on his stately stature, and his handsome majestic form, while his lustrous eyes smiled gently.

"My daughter, it has grieved us sorely that you should have been so long in rebellion against the Anointed of God; and believe me, the harshness of coercion has only been resorted to in the last extremity, and with the deepest reluctance and regret."

Idalia where she stood turned her head, and let her eyes rest full on his, with a meaning more than any words could ever have expressed.

"Monsignore, it will be as well for us to lay aside these

euphuisms. Neither of us believes them, and they weary both. Let us suppose them already uttered, and speak more truly—if a priest can speak so. I am your captive; it has long been one of the supreme ambitions of your life, and one of the most relentless efforts of your Church. I have baffled you long; you have trapped me at last. There is no more to be said."

Monsignore, the silken and astute diplomatist who wove the finest meshes of Court and Vatican intrigue, and was to be embarrassed by no living antagonist's skill, felt the blood burn under his olive skin, and felt the weakness of a bitter anger rise in him beneath the brief, tranquil, ironic words of his captive. Monsignore was never angered; the dulcet sweetness of his bland repose was never stirred by so provincial and unwise a passion; and he knew her power by that pulse of wrath she could stir in him. Yet he restrained it perfectly; he bowed with the grace for which he was renowned at St. Cloud and Compiègne.

"Pardon me, *figlivola mia*——"

"Pardon *me*, Monsignore! I am not of your communion; call me simply Madame de Vassalis."

The Prince-Bishop made a gentle deprecatory gesture with his white and elegant hands.

"Even those who have strayed from us we still hope to reclaim; and I speak as beseems me in the name of the Church. You have thought 'there is no more to be said,' since by force you have been brought within our authority. You err greatly; there are many things."

Her old superb, disdainful smile came on Idalia's face; the entrance of the churchman had roused in her all her native pride, all her worldly brilliance, all her royal defiance; she knew well enough with whom she had to deal, and the assumption of authority awoke in her all her dignity and dauntlessness.

"Many things?" she repeated, tranquilly. "Possibly! You would wish to know from me—your captive—the secrets of my party, the names of my associates, the securities of my wealth, many other matters that you consider have become yours by right through my conquest?"

Giulio Villaflor looked at her curiously, a little bewildered.

"It is so, my daughter," he said, blandly. "We would rather, you will be sure, receive these—our rights, as you justly say—voluntarily from you than be compelled to extract them by harsher means."

She laughed a little; a soft, mocking, ironic laugh.

"I imagined so. Well—it is as I said; there is nothing to be discussed between us; for all the weight of your Church, all the steel of your Swiss, will not force one word from *me*."

Monsignore started, and the purple blood flushed under the olive of his cheek and brow; his lips quivered, his teeth clinched on the full scarlet under lip. It was so utterly new to Giulio Villaflor to be mocked and bearded —and by a woman too!

His dulcet courtliness gave way, his mellow and honeyed sweetness curdled, the fire flashed into his eyes that had used to burn in the darkling glance of the men of his great hierarchy when Savonarola braved them or Kings defied their legate.

"'Will not' is never said to Rome!" he answered, with the haughty grandeur of the mighty days of the Papacy.

She faced him with a sovereignty not less disdainful and supreme.

"Indeed! I think many who have said it have been slain by Rome, silent unto death!"

His face darkened more and more; "contumacy" was the deadliest sin in his eyes; he would have stricken it out with the iron heel of Torquemada or Ximenes.

"Some crave death, and are forbidden it; they must *live* to do our bidding."

The words were uttered low, and the menace, though vague, was pregnant. For the moment there was intense silence, but her eyes never shrank, only in them deeper and deeper gathered the mute and fiery scorn.

"You threaten me?" she said, with cool, contemptuous carelessness, reckless how she provoked, so that she stabbed him. "It is scarcely worth while to so stain your manhood and your calling, Monsignore. I am in your power. There is little dignity in menace to a prisoner."

The kingly potentate, the silken churchman, the absolute tyrant, the tortuous courtier, shook in all his limbs with

rage She took his weapons from him, she rent his panoply, she silenced his eloquence, she pierced his nets, and an insidious passion crept in on him. She looked so beautiful there, in the fading russet light, with her Greek grace and her ironic pride, and her fettered, untamed, deathless royalty!

"She is a Semiramis! She is a sorceress!" he muttered in his throat, as he turned and paced the cell a moment, to still the feverish, angered, impatient bitterness rising in him and unnerving him. He felt to her as in the days of the Middle Age men felt to those women whom they sent to the stake for the dangerous sorcery, the white magic, of their too great charms.

She waited there, serene, unmoved, her eyes looking outward at the desolate and barren marshes, her hair slightly pushed back from her brows, the richness and the glitter of her mask dress the sole point of color in the gray gloom of the cell. She looked like a picture burnt in on the darkness of the naked prison wall.

His glance, licentious and ruthless under the velvet gentleness of his long-studied regard, devoured her loveliness with thirsty, astonished admiration. He had said of her that she had the daring of the Cæsars, but he thought now that she had the intoxication of a Cleopatra. He had heard of her power, he had heard of her witchery, he had heard of the insanity of men who loved her and thought a world well lost for her; he felt and understood the meaning of those stories now. And a proud, eager, cruel light dawned on his face. "*Altro!*" he murmured to himself, with the mocking smile of his full lips. What mattered it —her defiance, her beauty? She was his captive! Nominally the king's captive, virtually his. What mattered resistance?

He paused before her, subduing the glow of his thoughts beneath the fall of his silken lashes, long and soft as the lashes of women; and his voice had its sweetest melody.

"Madame de Vassalis, hear me. You have said justly you are a prisoner; in the power of a sovereign you have conspired against, of a government you have sought to undermine. To underrate your power for rebellion and for

evil would be absurd; it has been vast, and wrought by the surest spells that subjugate the heart and the soul of man——"

Her delicate, merciless smile arrested the words on his lips.

"What do *you* know of those spells, holy father?"

Though her life was in this man's power, to use as he would, she could not restrain the irony that gave her, the captive, so keen a weapon against her tyrant. A smile for which she could have killed him gleamed under his drooped lids.

"Had I never known them until now, this moment had sufficed to teach them!"

A haughty impatience swept over Idalia's face.

"Sir! I have had my surfeit of such compliments. From a priest I may surely look for immunity from their weariness."

The tiger-glitter glistened more darkly in his soft brown veiled eyes. How could he deal with this woman? Menace had no terror for her, homage no charm! Unconsciously his voice hardened and grew more imperious; she was the first who had ever braved or baffled him.

"Madame," he pursued, disregarding her words, "you know that you are liable to the full rigor of the law?"

"I know that I am in the power of those who never failed to use that rigor with or without right!"

"The church cannot err," he said, with the certain fiery majesty which, tyrannous and blind in its own belief of infallibility as it was, was yet the truest and greatest thing in him. "You fall within the pale of its most severe justice; yet the church, as you know well, will not deal with you; your sins will be left to the Secular Arm. Your wealth will be confiscated, your power crushed, your life passed in a felon's cell. You must know this."

"My wealth cannot be confiscated," she answered negligently, "for there is none of it lodged in Italy; you could scarcely imagine me so incautious! That you will give me no liberty while I have life I perfectly understand, and that King Francis and the Pontifical States alike treat the love of freedom and of justice as a convict's crime, all Europe is well aware. If you allude to my riches, imag-

ining that I will purchase my safety, you err; I will not swell a tyrant's treasuries to gain a personal indulgence."

Rage, hot and lowering, flushed Giulio Villaflor's brow as he heard; yet something of that unwilling homage which had been wrung from him when he had said, "She has the daring of the Cæsars!" was wrested from him now in an admiration that was half amaze, half intolerance; wholly sudden and very ferocious passion was controlled beneath the suave mellow hypocrisies which by long usage had become to him as second nature.

"Madame," he said, with a wave of his long delicate hand, "there are enormities and conspiracies of such magnitude that the wealth of the world could not purchase condonation or escape for them. Those of the Countess Idalia must be expiated; they cannot buy absolution either from the church she has blasphemed or the throne she has shaken. Captivity awaits you—captivity till death. Has it no terrors for you—for *you*, in your beauty, your youth, your magnificence, your reign of love and of pleasure?"

She looked him full in the eyes:

"Monsignore, you use strange language for a priest. Whatever my fate be, I merit it; not for the things which you quote against me as crime, but for luring to their graves the lives you and your murderers slew last night."

The nerves of his cheeks quivered with agitated wrath; not for his bishopric would he have had it known that he had looked on at the slaughter, and given the death-word at the Villa Antina. She laughed, in the aching bitterness of her heart, and in her dauntless scorn for the foes who had netted her in like a wired bird.

"Ah, that was a noble exploit, *beau sire;* a gentle and holy duty of an anointed of Christ! The cross has led the van of the slaughterers of life and of liberty many a time; you but followed the mission of priests in all ages,—to sow broadcast war and desolation, and to pile dead bodies by fire or by steel for the glory of God in the mission of peace! Go and kneel with Viana's blood on your head!—go and fill the throne of St. Peter with the murder of patriots heavy on your soul! Go—you have done no more than the men of your office have ever done since Hypatia was slain by Cecil, and the early Christians tore

and fought for rivalry in Alexandria, and Rome, and Byzantium!"

The light of the sun had died out, there was only the silvery gleam of a lamp Giulio Villaflor had brought in in his hand, and set down on the narrow stone table; in the mingled radiance and shadow she stood before the omnipotent Churchman, in whose hands her destiny was held, as though she were a feudal monarch who lashed a disobedient vassal with her displeasure and disdain. He stood, doubting his own senses; he the superb priest, he who aspired to the triple tiara, he the friend of emperors and the ruler of palace consciences, to be arraigned by a revolutionist, by an adventuress, whom his will could consign to the Vicaria, to linger there for life! He was convulsed scarce less with amaze than with wrath; and yet through all something of homage was wrung to the majestic courage which thus defied him.

"Per fede!" cried the prelate, the fury and the amazement in him breaking through the ever-impenetrable masking of his dulcet graciousness. "Per fede! you are bold indeed!"

"I leave cowardice to ecclesiastics, who net brave men like foxes, and who menace a captive when she can no longer revenge!"

A flush of shame and irritation came on his cheek; he was intolerant, cruel, cunning, an intriguer, a liar, a man of unscrupulous ambition, of intense and overweening pride and vanity; but he was withal a gentleman, and he felt the sting of the rebuke.

"I came—not to menace, but to persuade," he said, restraining the ardor she had roused in him, and bending on her the full luster of his soft eyes. "My daughter, you cannot suppose but that it is with the utmost repugnance, and only at the last extremity, that force will be resorted to by those you have so justly aroused against you. Your years, your sex, your brilliance, all render the task of chastisement, the exercise of severity toward you, a most painful duty."

She smiled.

"Neither royalty nor priesthood are likely to suffer much from compunction; and as for the things you name, I take

no refuge in the shield of my sex's weakness. I believe few men have merited your hatred and your rigor, or the vengeance of any tyranny, more than I have done."

Again she broke his patience, again she rent aside the courteous, polished suavity which never until now had failed him.

"You speak idly," he said, with a jarring anger and insolence in his voice. "You toy with words you know not the meaning of; you little dream what our 'rigor,' what our 'vengeance' can be to those who brave us!"

Her eyes rested calmly and contemptuously on his:

"Do I not? When my best-beloved friend Virginia von Evon was scourged in the streets of Pesth because she would not yield up an Hungarian 'rebel' who had trusted his life to her keeping; when Pauline Lasla perished under the ice and the irons of Siberia because she had carried dispatches for a Polish liberator; when the Countess Rossellio, at eighty years of age, was thrown into a dungeon by your order because she had lost her two noble sons in the cause of her Italy; when the wife of Manuel Canaro was shot down before his eyes by the soldiers of the Pope for no sin save that of loving liberty and him too well; when I have seen those and a score more martyrs like them, do you think I know nothing of how your hierarchy and your monarchy can revenge themselves on women? It is you, Monsignore, who speak idly; I am well aware that you will essay captivity first, and if that do not break me into betraying my friends to you and assigning you my wealth, why, then, that you will try—torture! It may be as well to spare you the probation, and to let you know that, though you have fettered me, you have not vanquished me, and never will. Others have died silent, and so can I."

The words were spoken tranquilly, with no haste, with no excitement in them; only beneath their repose of utterance was that fine, keen infliction of scorn, that proud, unyielding patience of resolve, which goaded and incensed him as no torrent of reproaches or of lamentations could have done. And yet, even in his wrath, even in his amaze, even in his outraged majesty as priest and autocrat, he could not but yield her admiration—admiration that stung

and fanned the passion in him to fire. He stood before her, as a Papal Legate might have stood before an Empress who defied his mission and the might of Rome, rather than as before a helpless and rebel captive.

"True!" he said, with that grandeur of dominance which made the iron priests of a dead age the scourge and terror of empires. "True! the Church must cut off and root up, even with steel and flame, the unworthy and the accursed who deny her supremacy. Pity can have no place where *her* holiness is menaced, where her kingdom is denied, where her reign is outraged. True!—even your sex cannot spare you from the chastening that she must, in the fullness of her divine love, bestow on you for the purification of your heresies and your rebellion——"

She stayed him with a gesture:

"Nay, Monsignore! we are not in the Cinque Cento, and you cannot burn me, though you can slay me more slowly and more cruelly, perhaps. A truce to this melodrame! We are both of the world; let us speak without tragedy. You say the Secular Arm will deal with me for my 'crimes,' why then are you here?"

The direct question staggered him slightly, but Giulio Villaflor was very rarely at fault; he bowed with grace.

"Because I would fain save you, were it possible, from the fruits of your own misguided recklessness."

"I thought so," she said, calmly, while his eyes fell beneath her smile. "I have said, I betray no one; and I give no bribes."

"In gold—no. And I seek none."

He leaned nearer to her, and his voice sank very low; the flush burnt darker in his olive cheek, and his eyes gazed on her beauty with a boldness that gleamed out under their veiled and velvet softness with a tiger-like ferocity, that those knew well as their death-doom who dared cross the will of Monsignore.

"In gold—no!" she echoed. "You seek my political secrets. Well, you will never have them."

"What!" His voice was very low still, and vibrated with the intensity of restrained passion through the silence of the cell. "You will renounce your pomp, your wealth, your pleasures, your ambitions, your freedom, for the toil

of a convict, the chains of a felon, the solitude of a dungeon, the slow, festering, hopeless, endless existence of a prisoner whom no power can release save the warrant of death!"

Her face was still, set, colorless as marble, and as firm:

"Yes, if liberty be only to be bought by the shame of treachery."

He looked at her, forced out of himself, as it were, by the tribute she wrung from him:

"Mother of God! What a man you would have been! —you would have ruled the world."

She smiled with a disdainful weariness.

"Who knows? I might have been a court ecclesiastic, and sold my soul for power to a sacerdotal lie!"

The satire pierced him to the quick, and all the darker and more cruel impulses returned on him. He stooped and laid his hand, with the amethyst ring that glittered like a basilisk's eyes, down upon hers; his voice stole very low on her ear.

"Idalia! women of your beauty can bribe more potently than by gold or state-lore. You shall buy your freedom if you will—from me."

She understood him; the blood flashed back into the colorless weariness of her face; she flung his touch off as though it had pollution; she faced him there in the dimness of the lamp-light with a look in her eyes before which he, all fearless, steeled, and omnipotent though he was, cowed like a lashed hound. Even Giulio Villaflor lacked the boldness which should dare twice tempt her with that alternative to purchase back her liberty.

"Monsignore," she said, briefly, and each word cut like ice, "if I refuse to be a traitress, I shall scarce consent to be your mistress. It were a poor choice of dishonor!"

He could have killed her in her haughty beauty, in her unsparing answer that laid bare the shame and evil of his own heart, that spoke out so mercilessly the meaning of his veiled words, of his hinted tempting! She had dared him, she had refused him, she had unmasked him—well, she should know of what fashion was the vengeance of Roman blood, of ecclesiastical dominion! He bent to her, his lips close to her hair, his eyes looking into hers, his

brown smooth cheek darkly stained with the purple flush of passions which nothing but that calm scorn of her fixed gaze, which never left him, which never drooped beneath the fierce menace of his own, held in any check.

"Madame de Vassalis, you might have given your beauty for your freedom and your wealth; you have refused. So be it! It is in my power without terms or concession. You might have reigned my mistress. You shall be now, instead, my toy for an hour, and languish, later, till the grave, in the King's prisons or the galley's shame. You were unwise, my brilliant revolutionist, to make a foe of me; you are *mine*, body and soul, in life and in death—mine to take when I will, to give where I choose!"

And, with these words, he flung his violet robe closer about him, and, without a glance at her where she stood, swept across the stone floor of the convent cell and left her presence; his keen ear had heard the footfall of a monk without.

"I come, my son—I come!" he said, gently, in his sweet lingering voice. "The captive is contumacious still, but, with discipline and persuasion, she may still be reclaimed to the august faith. Draw the bolts well—so! so!—and deal gently with her; she will see her error."

Alone where the silver lamp shed its lambent flickering light, Idalia thrust her hand within the folds of the rich scarlet and weighty broideries and sweeping lace of the masquerade dress she still wore, and drew half out from its resting-place in her bosom a delicate gold-sheathed Venetian stiletto, a jewel-studded toy slung by a chain round her throat. She looked at the slender, glittering, lithe blade, and smiled as she put it back.

"*His!*—while that steel will release me the moment his lips dare touch mine!"

For she had in her the temper of Lucretia.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"RIEN QUE TOI."

In the warm light of the summer morning the yacht steamed her way once more into the harbor of Capri. The Venetians were safe, and Erceldoune returned—to suffer, as he knew, and suffer hopelessly, yet no more able to hold himself back from it than the mariners were able to turn their prows from the magic music of yonder Syren Isles. Groups of fisher-folk were talking together gravely, and with an unwonted sadness on their ruddy, sunburnt faces; as he waded through the knee-deep surf he noticed it—his thoughts leapt to her in an instant—he asked the sailor nearest him what ailed them. The sailor was the man whose brother he had once rescued from the churning seas below Tiberio.

"It is the Comtessa Idalia, Signore."

"What of her?"

"They have arrested her!"

"Arrested her?"

He staggered against the brown timbers of a boat resting on the sands, and clinched them hard to keep himself from reeling like a drunken man. For the moment, old usage in many countries gave the word no meaning on his ear save in its criminal sense.

"So they say, Signore," answered the sailor, while his strong teeth set mastiff-like. "If I had been there, they should not have touched the hem of her skirts! It was done at the Villa Antina, in the interior; the soldiers shot many, I've been told."

"Many! Who?"

"Conspirators, Signore—so they say," replied the Capriote, who scarcely knew the meaning of the phrase, and thought the world governed to perfection if it proved a good fishing season, and many visitors came to the coast. "Some tell that his highness of Viana was killed. I don't

know about that; but Miladi Idalia is a prisoner of the King's."

With an oath, mighty as ever rang over the marches from the fierce lips of Bothwell, Erceldoune strode from him well-nigh ere the words were ended, and plunged down into the thicket of vegetation that led to the beetling cliff on which her villa stood. The sun was scorching, the ascent on the slope that faced the sea perilous to life and limb; there was no more than a perpendicular granite slab towering many feet above the water, covered with foliage and rock-flowers. But he was a trained mountaineer; he knew the ice-slope of the Alps as well as he knew the Border-land; he was up it with the swiftness of thought, swinging himself in mid-air from the tough coils of the tangled creepers till he reached the summit, and forced his way, without pause or ceremonial, into the court of the forsaken dwelling.

"No one passes!"

A soldier on guard stood within the arched entrance. Then he knew that it was true, and that she was lost to him, lost to the fangs of the Church, to the dungeons of the Bourbons.

"By whose order are you here?"

The words were hoarse and faint; he felt his lips parched with a dry white heat.

"The order of the King."

"The King's! Stand off!" cried Erceldoune, as though the very name of her tyrant maddened him. "What right have you, for all the despots who curse Europe, to invade her privacy, to violate her home!"

The sentinel said nothing, but lowered his bayonet till the blade was leveled against the intruder's breast. At that instant the deep howl of the hound moaned down the silence. Erceldoune shook with rage as he heard it. Was not her dumb beast even spared! He wrenched the weapon by the gunbarrel from the soldier's hand, flung himself on the slight frail form of the Neapolitan, and, tossing him aside lightly as a broken bough, dashed across the court to where the dog was chained. It was the work of a second to unloose and free him. Ere even that was wholly done, however, the three soldiers left on guard of the villa,

which had been rifled by governmental order of all papers, plate, jewels, and articles of value, roused by their comrade's cry, poured into the square court, and leveled their bayonets at him.

"Stir, and you are a dead man!" said the corporal in command.

A laugh was the only answer Erceldoune gave. His blood was up, and in his misery and his fiery rage he cared nothing, and almost knew nothing, of what he did or said.

"At them, Sulla!" he cried in Servian, lifting his hand.

With a bound the giant hound sprang on the soldier of Francis, and hurled him down as if he had been a dead boar. Erceldoune, with the single blow of his left hand, leveled another to the ground, and before the last sentinel could take aim or raise his fallen fellows, he sprang through the gateway, and, with the dog at his side, dashed headlong through the gardens and down the mountain road, without pause, without heed, well-nigh without sense.

The glow and color of the world of summer blossom, the fragrant stillness of the morning, the swinging of matin-bells from a chapel far above, the golden fruit that he tossed aside or trampled out as he rushed down the steep incline, all seemed dizzy, unreal, intangible; only one remembrance stood out clear before him—she needed him. He felt giddy and blind, a sickening oppression was on him, the intense odors of the myrtle and orange-flowers were intolerable to him; he felt maddened and senseless with pain; but he was not a man to yield to misery or dread while action was possible, while daring and skill could avail aught. Fire burned in his eyes, his lips shook, his teeth clinched like a vice; he grasped the wolf-hound's mighty mane in a gesture that Sulla understood as though volumes had been said in it.

"We will save her—or kill *them*."

The dog seemed instinctively to know that in his liberator was the avenger of his mistress. He accepted the lead, and followed passively. Repeated peril and dangerous emergencies, often met and vanquished by himself alone, had given Erceldoune the energetic vigilance, the knowledge and the patience of a soldier; his own nature—rash,

impulsive, and hotly impetuous, the habit of long and arduous service, had taught him the value of coolness and of self-restraint. His passions and his fiery chivalry of temper could have led him now to any madness, could have led him to seek out Francis in his own palace, and strike him down before all his nobles and all his guards, as her tyrant and her abductor. He had the blood in him of Border chiefs who had fought for Mary Stuart, and Scottish soldiers who had served with Gordon's archers, of haughty Castilians who had died for a point of honor, and steel-clad Spaniards who had conquered with the Great Captain, and a vein of the old dauntless, reckless, fearless, romantic knight-errantry of a dead day was in him, little as he had known it. His rival had not erred when he said that the "Border Eagle" should have lived in the Crusades. But not the less did he know now that discretion and self-control were needed to serve her; not the less did he bend to their curb the violent longings of his own wretchedness.

He paused a moment where a deep leafy nest of rock and foliage screened him from all sight, and tried to still the throbbing misery of his thoughts, and search out the nearest clew to find her. She was in the power of her foes; royal soldiers held her villa; that she was deeply compromised in political matters was evident; where she might now be taken the jailers who held her alone knew. He shuddered as he remembered all the histories he had heard of the vengeance of the monarchists on those who had defied them! Her dog was with him; the sentinels would tell the story of his onslaught on them; if noticed, he would be suspected and watched, possibly even arrested. To go to Naples was to risk arousing suspicions that might render every effort to save her useless. He must be unknown, untracked, or he could do nothing; yet he must keep the hound with him, for no aid could be so sure to track her as Sulla's scent and unerring instincts of fidelity. The dog stood now beside him, the fine nostrils quivering, the ears pointed, every nerve on the stretch, and every now and then a piteous anguish in the brown lustrous eyes as they were turned on him with a low heartbroken moan.

He stood and thought some moments, then rapidly, and keeping ever under the deep shelter of the leaves, he made his way by winding paths to the hut of the sailor whose life he had saved long before on San Constanza's-day. It stood near the beach, hid under a great ledge of rock, like a sea-gull's nest. As it chanced, the fisherman sat without in the sun, singing and mending his nets; he was only just back from a long sail to Calabria. Erceldoune went up to him and held out his hand.

"Nicolò, do you remember the night under Tiberio?"

The nets fell on the sand in a heap, all sea-stained and clogged with weed. The marinaro, with tears of delight in his bright black eyes, and a thousand cries to the Madonna dell' Mare, thanked him and blessed him and worshiped him, and would have knelt down at his feet had he been allowed. Life surely was no great matter there in the Piccolo Marina, getting scant bread from the depths of the waters, spreading the nets on the low flat shingle-hut roof to dry, and going out in peril of storms for sake of a piece of dry fish for hungry mouths to eat; yet it must have had its pleasures too, for the fisher Nicolò was grateful for saving of it as though he had been crowned with gold.

"You will do a thing for me, Colò?" asked Erceldoune, as he arrested the torrent of gratitude.

"I will risk body and soul for you, Signore!"

"I believe you would. I only want you to sell me a fishing-suit such as you wear, and some of your fishing-nets and lines."

"I will *sell* you nothing, 'Lustrissimo," said the sailor, doggedly, and with a certain wounded pride. "I will give you everything my poor hut holds."

"And I will take it as willingly. Forgive me for using the word of barter!"

The Capriote's eyes beamed with delight at the concession and the comprehension.

"Come within, Eccellenza."

Erceldoune bent his lofty head, and entered the low, square, sea-scented hut, with the half-naked children, handsome as young seraphs running wild, and the yellow gourds, and dried herbs, and onion-ropes hanging from the rafters. As it chanced, there was a suit, unworn except on saints'

days, and of full size, for the marinaro was of high stature and powerfully built. In a few moments his own white yachting dress was changed for it; he set the scarlet-tasseled cap on his head, wore nothing over the loose striped shirt that left his arms so free, and flung some nets over his shoulders. With the bronze hue of his skin and the sweeping darkness of his beard, no casual glance would have detected him to be other than a Capriote.

"Shall I pass as a marinaro?" he asked the sailor.

Nicolò smiled.

"You look more like a king in disguise."

"I am sorry for it. Now, while I wait here, will you pull out to the yacht, give the captain this ring from me as credentials, and bid him send me, by you, all the gold and circular-notes I have on board, my pistol-case, powder-flask, cartridge-case and shot-belt, and a pocket-flask of brandy? Say nothing of my disguise, and be as quick as you can, for God's sake."

The Capriote obeyed, got his little boat out rapidly, and pushed off from the shore with hearty good will. Erceldoune sat at the hut door with the hound crouched at his feet, and his eyes fixed on the waste of waters. All the glories of the bay were spread before him, but it might have been a sand-desert for aught that he knew or saw; the fishing-skiff flew light and swift as a bird over the sea, but to him it seemed scarcely to move; every moment was a pang, every minute appeared eternity. While he waited here in the noontide glare, how might she not be tortured! —while the hours flew on, how might not her foes be wringing her proud heart! Time was passing so fast: three days, they said, had gone by since the arrest at Antina; Heaven only knew how many leagues she might have been borne since then, to what remote inaccessible recesses of Alps or Apennines, monastic prison, or mountain-shut morass, she might not have been taken ere now! The fever of an intolerable agony possessed him. While he was in action he could bear it; it was something at least to be in search for her, to be in her service, to be on her track; but to sit here while those eternal matins tolled the passing seconds away, and the fishing-boat seemed to glide snail-like over the width of the sea! The swinging

monotone of the chapel bell, the measured dips of the oars, seemed to beat into his brain and drive him senseless. What was it to him that she had told him his passion was hopeless? If he could give her back her freedom and her happiness, he felt that he could die in peace.

Nicolò returned very rapidly, laggard as the time had appeared, bringing all for which he had been sent. The money was the whole, or very nearly, of his three months' pay just drawn—some two hundred pounds or less of circular notes in a chamois-leather pouch. He left, unseen, several gold pieces of it in a wooden bowl from which the fisherman was used to drink his onion soup, then slipped the pistols in his sash and the pouch in his shirt, and turned again to Nicolò.

"Now take me across, some way off Naples, if you can, and let me land unnoticed in the nearest route for Antina."

The marinaro, with all the alacrity of his craft, had ready his sailing-boat, a small lugger, awkward but seaworthy, in very little time, and, with his eldest son at the helm, pushed off once more into deep water. Erceldoune sat silent and deep in thought, the hound at his feet, couched on the bottom of the vessel, watching him ever with deep, keen, mournful eyes. The day was beautifully still; the bay alive with innumerable craft, and gay with sails of tawny stripes and flags of all nations' hues. Naples lay white and matchless in her sunlit grace; he saw no more of the glory about him than though he were blind. He thought they sailed slowly as a death barge; in truth, the lugger danced over the light curled waves and through the snowy surf as brightly as a monacco on the wing.

Nicolò knew every inch of the coast, and landed at length in a small lonely creek, hidden in profuse vegetation, where there was just depth enough to steer the vessel in, and let the beach be reached by wading.

"Yonder lies Antina, Signor," said the fisherman; "a league to the left by that road where the cypresses are. You see?"

Erceldoune took the man's brown hand in his and wrung it hard.

"I see! I cannot thank you now, Nicolò. Later on, if I live——"

The Capriote fixed his large black eyes tenderly and wistfully on him.

"Eccellenza, you go into some danger. Let me be with you."

Erceldoune shook his head.

"Why not, Signor?" pleaded Nicolò, entreatingly. "When *I* was in peril, you came to me, down into the churning seas, at risk of your own life. The boys can take the boat back. Let me come!"

Erceldoune put him gently back.

"Not now, Colò, though I could wish for no better comrade. But what I do, I must do alone."

He broke from the man's entreaties and conjurations, and went up through the tangled thickets of arbutus and through the fields of millet rapidly, and never looking back; every moment was so precious. The fisherman stood watching him sadly.

"It is *she*," he said. "It is so with them all! She is a sorceress. I am glad I crossed myself whenever I met her, though old Bice calls her an angel, because she promised Fanciulla a dower. I am glad I crossed myself!"

A league brought him to Antina—a league that lay through olive grounds, and green fields of maize, and vineyards, and sunburnt grass-land, which his slashing stride, that was the walk of the mountaineer, covered rapidly. To anything like fatigue he was insensible. Since the hour when she had found him in the pine woods his life had been spent in one vain pursuit—the search for Idalia; yet never had he sought her as he sought her now.

He passed into the villa grounds: nearer the building he dared not venture; it would be occupied, in all likelihood, also by soldiers, and the sight of a fisherman loitering so far inland would of itself excite suspicion. But toward the entrance the hound paused, tore the earth up in mad haste, snuffed the ground, ran round and round again, threw his head in the air, then gave a deep-mouthed bay of joy, and looked back for a sign to Erceldoune. He stooped and laid his hand on the dog's mane;

his own heart was beating so thickly that he felt sick and reeling; here his one hope had centered—that Sulla would find her trail.

"Seek her," he said, simply.

The hound needed no other command; with his muzzle to the earth he tore it up by handfuls, searching hither and thither; then settled to his work as the pack settle to line-hunting, and dashed off—not inward toward the gardens, but out to the open country. Stooping an instant ere he followed him, Erceldoune, whose eye and ear were well-nigh as trained as an Indian's—for they were those of one of the first deer-stalkers of Scotland,—saw the mark of wheels, very faint on the parched arid turf that was dry and bare as bone, but still there. Hope rose in him;—if he were not too late!

Onward he went in the burning sun-glare, with the weight of the nets on his shoulder, and the heat pouring down into the scarlet wool of the fishing-cap; onward, where the dog led through the long heat of the day, through the shades of evening, through the stilly silver starlight, as one succeeded the other. It was tedious, arduous, wearying work; bringing so little recompense, needing such endless patience. Often the hound lost scent, and had to try back to where he had lost the sign of the wheels, as though it were the slot of a stag; often the dry crisp grasses or the baked white dust of the roads bore no scent at all, or the crossing and recrossing of other tracks blurred the marks and confused the trail; often the impress of a mule's hoofs or the heavy footprints of a contadina had struck out or overlaid the faint traces which only guided the dog. Often, also, for a priest, or a peasant party going to an *infiorata*, or, worse yet, for a set of soldiers scouring the country, he had to seek shelter in some dank dell of woodland, on some sandy pine-knoll, under the gray twisted olives, or beneath a tumble-down shed, and hide, as though he were himself the prisoner hunted, forcing Sulla to lie still beside him. But he had spent many a long day in the patient toil of deer-stalking in the Highlands at home, and he brought the same wariness and the same long endurance here. If he had once abandoned himself to the misery of thought, to the fierceness of ven-

geance, he could never have borne the intolerable slow-dragging bitterness of this endless search; but he would not give way to them, and he would not let them urge him into the madness which could have made him dash down into Naples and demand her at the hands of the Bourbon. He knew that if it were possible to save her, thus only could it be done; and he gave himself to the toil without pause, and with a self-restraint that cost him more than all.

Three days and three nights were spent thus; he began to think in his agony that he should only find her—if ever he found her—dead. His search was chiefly made after the sun was down; the day, when he had not to secrete himself and the hound from those who might have thought their aspect suspicious, and from village authorities who might have challenged his appearance away from a seaport, he spent in questioning the country people, as far as he could, without exciting wonder or counter inquiry. Happily, he could speak the Neapolitan patois to a miracle, and he supported his character of a fisherman well enough with most; some thought, like Nicolò, that he looked more like a prince in disguise, but he was frank and comrade-like with them, drank with them, ate their own coarse food, and could give them a hand in mending their roof after a storm, in digging a trench round their olives, or in reaping their maize, and he lived so like one of themselves, that he soon conciliated them, and persuaded them that he was a paid-off mariner who had sailed to far distant places, and liked now to wander at will over the country.

From them he gleaned various news; nothing that told him, however, the one great thing—where Idalia had been taken. When the sun set each day, and he was free from observation, he put Sulla on the track again, from the spot where they had last left it, and worked on the line unwearyingly through the nights. The hound had been perfectly trained, and understood what was needed of him to a marvel; he had attached himself to Erceldoune with a strange sagacity of instinct, seeming to lay aside the jealousy he had hitherto shown him for sake of their mutual love and service to the one both had lost. Such sleep

as he was obliged to take he took in the hottest hours of the day under the screen of millet-sheaves, or in the cool shade of deep ravines filled with chestnuts or cypresses; with the fall of evening he resumed the search, and through the clear lambent light of the Italian moon, or in the gloom of frowning hills and woods, the two shadows of the man and dog glided unceasingly; bending down and seeking hither and thither;—some who saw them crossed themselves, and took them for the shades of some ghastly huntsman and his phantom hound; others, more practical, took them for truffle seekers, despite the gigantic size of the animal. Not one ever ventured to stop them; a rough muleteer once tried a parley in the midnight on a lonely hillside path, and said something, with a menace, of his fancy for the brandy-flask, whose silver head he saw under the folds of the waist-sash; but a blow with the butt-end of one of the pistols soon silenced him by leveling him with the brown-burnt moss, and Erceldoune was molested no more. Slowly—very slowly—and with an infinite toil and patience, he worked his way by the guidance of the hound's lead, till the dawn of the fourth day brought him into the rugged, desolate, morass-intersected country, where, dark and sullen above the miasma-haunted lake at its foot, the square castellated building of the isolated monastery stood among its stunted trees, with the bare gray cliff towering at its back. It was a red, stormy, misty, oppressive morning, very hot and poisonous in its heat as the steam rose up from the black still waters and the wastes of swamp, while beyond stretched the gray of the monotonous olive and the still more distant black peaks of cypress-topped hills, as the hollow booming vesper-bell of the monks swung wearily through the heavy air. "There is no fortress here; is the dog in error?" he thought, as he entered on the dreary desert of the level marshy land, with no sound in it except the echo of the tolling bell and the noise of the moor-fowls startled from their rest among the reeds and sedges. But the hound held on, growing keener and hotter as the scent grew stronger and the wheel-marks plainer in the damp sodden ground than they had been on the dusty roads and the traversed highways. With his muzzle to the ground,

he dashed onward mile on mile across the country at a speed that taxed the Border fleetness of his companion. There were quagmires, morass, hidden pools, sponges of mud, small lagunes hidden under treacherous grasses or rushes, unseen pools where the water-birds brooded by hundreds, swamps where a single false step would be death for any sinker under the yielding, soaking, nauseous mass; but the hound never missed his footing or erred in his going, and Erceldoune followed him through the gray of the morning; his heart beat to suffocation, the brown lonely waste reeled before his eyes, the hot noxious air seemed to weigh down his breath and stifle him, but a delirium of hope came on him;—the dog must be near at last! Straight in his level chase, straight as though he were running down a stag across an open plateau, fleet as the wind, and with his mighty crest bristling and his eyeballs red with flame, Sulla led on, across the marshes, across the shallow ponds, over the trembling mass of water-sodden earth, through the steaming vapor rising from the lakes—led on till he stood under the broken granite crags on which the monastery was raised above the still, black, reedy surface of the lake.

Then, with one rolling bay like thunder, he woke all the echoes of the lonely silent dawn. Afar from on high, through the gloom of an arched casement, through the swaying flicker of dank leaves, through the transverse lines of iron bars, eyes dark as night, weary as pain, looked down on him;—they were the eyes of Idalia.

She sat in the monastic cell which was her prison-chamber, with the bare hot glare of the sunlight, that burnt all nature black and barren, and made the disease-laden vapors rise up from the swamps below, scarcely entering through the narrow lancet-chink that was the sole casement of this cold stone cage, in which they had shut their brilliant plumaged bird. Her hands rested on the slab of granite that was her only table; links of steel held the wrists together: they had allowed her no change of raiment, and the lustrous colors and gold broideries of the mask dress still swept the damp flags of the floor, though all jewels had been taken from her. She had been

here six days and six nights a captive of the Bourbons; what was yet worse, a captive of the Church.

Food of the coarsest and the scantiest was all that had been allotted her, and once — "for contumacy," — her priestly jailer's hands had been stretched to tear down the silks and lace from her shoulders, and bruise and lacerate them with the scourge; once—when the dignity that they were about to outrage so foully had made the monk, who was bidden to the office, drop the lash, aghast and trembling, and his superior, who had directed the infamy, feel too much shame in the moment to hound him on to his work. They had desisted for twenty-four hours more. "By then," they had muttered, "the rebellious subject might have broken her silence, and become less obdurate to the due demands of Church and King."

The twenty-four hours had well-nigh gone by, but Idalia had given no sign of yielding; she had scarcely spoken since the day that Giulio Villaflor had quitted her presence. She knew that the lightest word might be construed into confession, or used as evidence against those whom they wanted her to betray; and she had strength in her to endure torture unflinchingly, without breathing one syllable that should sound as an entreaty for mercy, or be translated into a hint against her comrades in adversity. She knew well what she had to anticipate; she did not seek to palliate to her own thoughts the horror of the doom that awaited her; she knew that only by death, self-dealt, could she escape the passion of the libertine who held her in his gripe; she knew that when that had had its way, and grown sated of its own violence, she would if she lived, drag out existence in agony, in shame, in felon companionship, in hopeless bondage; she never veiled from herself the depth and the despair of the wretchedness that awaited her, and she knew that not even her sex would shelter her from the barbarity of physical torture, till that torture should kill her bodily strength, or her persecutors learn that it was powerless to destroy her resolve and break her silence. She knew the fate that awaited her, but never for one instant did the thought glance by her that she could purchase freedom from it all by betraying those whose lives she held in her keeping, or by going

willingly to the loathed love of her ecclesiastical captor. Such weakness as that was not possible to her nature; she had a virile courage, a masculine reading of all bonds of honor; this woman, bred in luxury, in self-indulgence, in power, in patrician tastes, and epicurean habits, had the nerve in her to endure all things, rather than to purchase her redemption by a traitor's recreancy.

She had been successful hitherto in concealing from her jailer the slender shaft of the stiletto, and she was prepared in extremity to use it; she had too much of the old Greek heroism to fear such a death, and had too many of the old, dauntless, pagan creeds not to hold its resource far nobler than a long dishonored life of endless misery.

Where she leaned now, with her chained hands lying on the stone, and the darkness and the silence of the stone cell about her, her face was colorless, but it had on it no fear, no weakness: it was only grave, and very weary. Her thoughts had gone to many scenes and memories of her past—the past which, in eight brief years of sovereignty, had been fuller and more richly colored than a thousand drawn-out lives that never change their gray still calm from the cradle to the grave. Endless hours of those dead years rose before her to haunt her in this black solitude, in these chill iron-bound walls, in which the magnificence of her life had ended—hours in the lustrous glare of Eastern suns, under the curled leaves of palm, and the marble domes of ruined temples; in the laughing riot of Florentine nights, when the carnival-folly reeled flower-crowned adown the banks of Arno; in the gaslit radiance of Paris, when the fêtes of the Regency revived for her; in summer evenings in Sicilian air, when the low chants echoed softly over Mediterranean waters, and the felucca, flower-laden, glided through the starlight to music and to laughter; in palaces of Rome, of Vienna, of Prague, of Venice, where the dawn found the banqueters still at their revels, and no wines that flushed purple and gold in the blaze of the lights and the odors of perfume intoxicated the drinkers like the glance of her eyes, like the spell of her smile—all these scenes rose up above her, and filled with the hues of their life and their splendor the barren, bitter, stone-locked loneliness in which she was immured. She had loved her

reign; she had loved her scepter; she had loved those years so crowded with triumphs, with pleasures, with mirth, with wit, with radiance, with homage, with peril that only lent them keener zest, richer flavor; she had loved them, though beneath t e purples fetters had held her, and amid her insouciance remorse had pursued her; she had loved them—and they were dead forever. She was chained here a prisoner of captors who never spared until their brother-tyrant, Death, claimed their spoil and their prey at their hands.

"It is just—only just," she thought, where her head leaned on the cold steel clasping her wrist, and the black moisture-dripping blocks of the cell inclosed her as though already she were in her grave. "I sent them to their graves; it is only just that I should have a felon's doom."

A shiver ran through her like a shiver of intense cold, though the close air of the cell was oppressive and scorching! It was not for her own life, but for the lives that had fallen around her, like wheat beneath the sickle, in the banqueting-halls of Antina.

The silence was unbroken; one burning ray of the outer sun stole through the loophole and flashed on the steel gyves inclosing the hand, whose lightest touch had thrilled men's veins like fire, and impelled them where it would; the dank, noiseless, gray gloom was like the gloom of a charnel-house. Suddenly on that stillness broke the challenge of the hound's bay.

Idalia started; she knew the familiar sound that rolled out like the roll of a clarion. The color flushed her face, she moved rapidly to the casement; through the glare of the hot, pitiless sun, below, beneath the shelving precipice of rock, she saw the dog, and saw who was his comrade.

She knew him in the first moment that his longing eyes looked upward, and knew his errand there—knew that he had come to save her, or to die with her.

"O God!—he, too!"

The words escaped her involuntarily where she stood alone, leaning against her prison bars, as the hound shook all the echoes from the rocks around with the impatience of his summons; she had seen so many perish, she would fain have saved this man.

Through the space of the sultry white sun-glare that severed them his eyes met hers, and spoke in that one look all the force of the ardor, all the fidelity of the devotion, that had brought him once more to the woman who, for good or evil, had become the ruler of his life. At that gaze her own eyes filled, her lips trembled; such love had been oftentimes lavished on her, yet never had it moved her as it moved her now. She had told him that no other thing save misery could come to him through her; she had forbidden him even the baseless solace of hope; she had bade him fear, scorn, hate, flee from her; and nothing had killed his loyalty, nothing had burnt out his passion.

A glow of warmth passed over her; an infinite tenderness made the tears gather in her eyes as she saw this faith against all trial borne to her, this chivalry through every ordeal stanch to her.

"If a straight stroke and a lion heart could deliver me, how soon I should be free!" she thought. "He comes too late—too late!"

Too late; not alone to unloose her bonds and rend her from her jailers, but too late to wake her heart to his, to find her life unusurped, to be sufficient for her in the lotus-dream of love.

The step of a monk was heard without as one of the brethren passed to fetch water from a well that was built under the shadow of a few cypress-trees some score yards from the convent. She left the barred casement, signing her lover toward the deep shade where the blackness of overhanging rocks made a refuge into which not even the noon-rays could penetrate.

He comprehended and obeyed the gesture to secrecy and silence; his heart was beating to suffocation, his blood felt on fire, wretchedness and rapture rioted together in him. He had found her! So much was mercy; but she was in the gripe of those who never spared; she was in the power of those who never unloosed their prey; the battalions of an army could scarce avail to wrench her from the united hate of Bourbon and of Rome. He knew it; he knew that he was but one man against the whole force of a government and a hierarchy, but the Border boldness in him rose the higher for that; the reckless romance

of the old Spanish Paladins that slept in his blood awakened as wildly as it ever awakened in the comrades of Campeador or the knights of Ponce de Leon.

"I will deliver her, or die for her!" he swore in his throat: and he had never yet broken an oath.

Forcing the dog to quietude, he drew back from the monastery into the shade of the stunted cypresses, and threw his lines into a lake-like pool that lay at the foot of the rocks; an angler's pursuit went well enough with his *barcarolo's* dress. The water was reedy, yellow, stagnant in places, with islets of river grasses, in which water-fowl herded by thousands; but the care of the monks, who made their sole repasts from its treasuries, kept it well stocked with fish, and in a brief time he landed both dace and roach, though his strong wrists trembled as they had never done when a Highland salmon had dragged him miles down the length of a moorland river in a wrestling duel that lasted from noon till evening.

The monk, returning with his buckets from the well, saw the sacrilegious raid upon the heaven-dedicated food, and as the angler had relied on, drew near him in wrath and in rebuke.

"Nay, good father," said Erceldoune, lifting the fish to him, "I am an idle fellow; grudge me not a chance of doing a trifle for Holy Church. I am more used, may be, than your brethren to filling a creel quickly."

"My son, you are welcome to our charity," replied the monk, a little confused at finding a robber offer him so willingly the spoils. "All I meant was, that of a truth, such varlets and ruffians poach on the waters that we are obliged to guard them something strictly. You have a supple wrist and a marvelous strength; we," added the friar, with a sigh of envy, "angle all day sometimes, and catch nothing."

"Let me fish for you, father," said Erceldoune. His heart throbbed with hope and dread as he preferred a request on which all his future fate would hang; but he had control enough to speak carelessly, and his Neapolitan accent was so perfect that the monk never doubted his country. "Let me fish for you; and give me in recompense a night or two's lodging. I shall be well paid."

"You are poor, my son?"

"Poor enough."

"And a wanderer?"

"I have been a wanderer all my life."

"In truth? You are a fine fellow, and if you really want the Church's alms——"

The Cistercian hesitated; a monastery could scarce refuse its charity, yet the orders of the superior were strict to treat all strangers with circumspection, and, if possible, to admit none.

"See here, father," said Erceldoune, rapidly. "I want no man's alms, lay or clerical; but if you like to strike a bargain, here is one. You are not much of sportsmen, I fancy; now I have all that lore by heart. I am a wild *barcarolo*, but I know none could beat me in river-craft or in shooting. You have ospreys and cormorants in these sedges that eat half the fish in the lake; you have wild swans that would make you savory messes to sicken you forever of maize and of lentils; you have shoals of small fresh-water fish that I will snare by thousands in my nets, and, salted, they will last you the whole winter through;—let me work for you on the water, and give me in payment a lodging for myself and my dog. I will warrant you you shall have the best of the bargain."

His voice shook a little with an eagerness he could not repress; the monk, a comely, good-humored, elderly man from the Umbrian marshes, a poor brother who did servile offices, and was at once porter and angler and hewer of wood and drawer of water for the monastery, felt his eyes glisten and his lips taste savory things as he thought of the wild swans in a potage, and his own labors lightened by the stalwart arm and the fearless skill of this adventurer. He looked a moment curiously in Erceldoune's face; its frank, bold, proud features won his trust instantly, as they won the trust of all who looked on them; he glanced longingly at the fowl-filled sedges.

"Wait a moment, my son. I have no power to grant your request myself, but I will go speak with the almoner, and see what we can do. If the Father Superior will listen to your wish, I shall be glad enough for one, for Holy Mary knows it is hard work and thankless to find

food for seventy hungry mouths and lean stomachs in these barren lands. Wait a second, and I will be back."

He heaved up the water-buckets, and went his way with bent shoulders and plodding steps. Erceldoune stood by the lake-side, with his eyes fastened on the barred loop-hole whence the eyes of the sovereign of his life had looked down on him. He thought he saw the gleam of her hair in the shadow on high; he thought she gazed on him, though for both their sakes she dared not do so openly; he felt his cheek change color like a woman's; he felt his limbs tremble as with a woman's tremor;—all chance of aid to her, of deliverance for her, rested on this one hazard he had tried of obtaining entrance to the convent that was her prison-house.

It seemed to him an eternity while the monk was absent; anxiety made his eyes blind and his head swim as he saw the brother at last returning;—if his request were denied! if his disguise were penetrated! The first words he heard made him feel giddy with their joy.

"My son, be it as you will," said the monk; "and I pray you kill a swan quickly. The Father Superior is pleased to grant your prayer; and we will lodge you and give you food, if you will shoot and fish and labor in the marshes, as you have said, till our buttery be stocked and our waters be well netted."

Erceldoune bent his head, so that the rush of vivid joy that flushed his face should not betray him.

"I will labor for you, father, night and day if you will," he said, briefly.

Would he not have labored like a galley-slave through summer drought and winter chills if, by his labor, he could have bought one smile from her or spared her a moment's pang! Then, without more words, he loaded, fired, and brought down a wild swan on the wing.

"Chee-e-e!" murmured the Cistercian, ruffling the snowy plumage and thinking longingly of the savory stew that would vary their refectory fare that night, while he stared at the *barcarolo* as at a stranger from some unknown world. "You are a wonderful shot, my friend. If you go on like that, we shall have the best of the bargain, as you said, for you will find but sorry lodgment with us. Can you sleep on a shake-down of dry grass?"

"I have slept on bare earth and bare decks many a time before now."

"Truly? Yet you look of noble blood?"

"Good blood is scant use if our fortunes be low."

"Ah! You have fallen on evil days?"

"Very evil."

"And you were of proud stock once?"

"Good father, I thought in the eyes of the Church all men were equal."

He spoke curtly, to rid himself of the Cistercian's restless curiosity, and flinging his fishing-shirt open at the breast, he set himself to fixing the stakes and the nets at the head of the great pool. Every sort of wood and water lore had been familiar to him from his earliest boyhood; every secret of the loch and heather he had learnt from the days of childhood. With all the skill and strength that were in him he went to the toil of working for the monastery fare, of reaping such a harvest from the marshes and the sedges and the lakes as should make the brethren give him lodging with favoring cordiality and without questions. He worked like a slave, in the scorch of the Italian sky, conscious of no fatigue, sensible of no pain; he worked for her, and on him her eyes might rest from her prison-chamber. It gave him a Samson's force, an Indian's patience. Wading knee deep through the pools, he stretched his nets across the head of the water, as he had known the poachers to do many a night across the weir of Highland rivers. Afraid of wasting such powder and shot as he had with him, he made a sling from a strip of his sash, and slew with unerring aim the wild teal that flocked among the osiers, till they were flung in scores on to the arid banks. He mowed down the reeds where the fish-destroying birds were sheltered, so that they should haunt the monastery waters no more, and bore the rushes in great sheaves to land. He labored without rest, and doing the work of twenty men, in the full downpour of the vertical heat, and all through the length of the day, while his friend the Umbrian brother sat luxuriously, with folded hands, staring at him like an owl lazily blinking in the sunlight.

He labored without ceasing, and with a hot joy at his

heart; afar, where the gray walls towered, the eyes of Idalia watched him, and with sunset he would have earned the right to sleep under the roof that made her prison. It sufficed, with his high hope and his high courage, to give him almost happiness. He could not believe that love like his would ever be powerless to defend and to release her.

All through the long day he worked unweariedly among the reedy waters, under the frowning shadow of the monastery-crowned rocks. And from her cell she gazed on him; on the bold heroic cast of the head, and the sun-warmed brow from which the waves of hair were dashed; gazed on him where, under the cypress shadows, through the sear rushes, through the sullen waters in the yellow glare, he toiled as peasants toil, for her—for her, though she had bidden him forsake even her memory forever, though she had told him that suffering alone could be his portion through her.

Out of the gloom and silence of her stone-locked cage she gazed down on him at his labor through the long hot hours of the southern summer day, and her eyes were heavy with a regretful languor, her lips parted with a sigh of weariness.

"Too late!" she thought—"too late!"

The sun sank down, a globe of red flame in an angry sky; the day was done, and with it the day's travail. More had been gathered in it out of the wastes around than the laggard tempers of the slothful brethren gathered in a month. Erceldoune stooped eagerly, and drank long draughts of thin crimson wine out of a half gourd-rind that the Umbrian monk held to him, looking at him the while with a curious, compassionate, wondering, envying glance.

"You are tired, my son? Ah! what limbs, what strength! Come within; you shall sup with us, and have such a dormitory as we can give you. Bring the great beast too, if there be no danger in him; certes, he is a giant like you."

Erceldoune, as he lifted his head from the wine, felt his face as flushed as the stormy sunset light that fell on it; a wild, senseless joy was on him—he should be within the

walls that held her. He laid his hand on the hound's collar, with a gesture to silence well enough understood by the animal, and followed mutely the brother.

Jagged precipitous flights of steps, rough hewn in the rock itself, led up to the monastery. The entrance-door was a low-browed iron-studded arched barrier of oak, impregnable as granite. It yielded slowly, unwillingly, with a grating jar as the monk pushed it open.

"Enter, my son."

Erceldoune stooped, and passed through it into the vaulted stone passage-way within, dark as twilight; the door swung weightily back to its place, the great bolts rolled into their sockets, the dying day and the living world were alike shut out. Thus far one desire of his heart had fulfilled itself; he shared her prison-house with Idalia.

"This way, my son," said the Umbrian, as he turned down a tortuous vaulted passage which led to the monks' dormitories, small stone cells one in another, with dried grasses shaken down, as he had said, for pallets, and the moisture dripping from the naked walls. The Cistercians of this place were very poor; and Giulio Villaflor loved vicarious mortification, and was very stringent on his monks' asceticism and devotion, visiting the slightest laxity with a fearful rigor.

The poor brother, at whose girdle hung the huge keys of the ecclesiastical fortress, motioned to one of the little chambers.

"This is yours, my son. I will come to you in half an hour. We sup then in the refectory."

Erceldoune, left in solitude, closed his door and drew its massive bolt; then stripping off his clothes, dashed the cold water that stood in a pitcher over him, rearranged his fisher-dress as best he could, slung the pistols again in his sash, dropped beside the dog on the hay, and let his head sink on his hands. He was beneath the same roof with her; the knowledge made his heart beat thickly, and his temples throb. But—how to save her?

It would be as dangerous to wrench her from the jaws of the Church as to rend an antelope from a panther's jaws and talons. Yet his teeth ground together under the

sweeping darkness of his beard, his hand felt for the butts of his belt-pistols. "I can die with her at least," he thought, "and send some of her foes to damnation first."

His love was too fervent and too true not to be pagan in its longing and his vengeance.

The half hour soon passed as he sat lost in thought, feverish, tempestuous, conflicting; the Umbrian brother came to him.

"Our supper is ready, my brother; it is richer than common, thanks to your woodcraft and your angling."

Erceldoune followed him, leaving the hound at guard.

A long arched stone corridor led to the refectory, a desolate, dimly-lit hall of the same rough-hewn stone, with a few feeble oil lamps flickering in the great sea of gloom. The board was simply spread with fried fish and a simmering soup, in which the wild swan and some of the water-fowls were stewed with lentils and capsicums. Some seventy monks sat round it, breaking black bread, and scenting longingly though with downcast eyes and immutable lips the unwonted savor of the fare. As his ringing steps sounded on the stone floor, the recluses looked with a dreary, dull wonder at this man with his superb manhood, with his luxuriant beard, and his stalwart build, with his mountain freedom of glance and of movement, who seemed to bring a draught of wild, strong, fresh forest-breeze into the darkness and solitude of their prison.

He made his reverence gravely to the white-haired elder whom they pointed out as the Superior, then seated himself at the lower end of the board, and took the food proffered him. Many eyes studied him inquisitively, but no questions were asked; an unbroken silence prevailed as the meal went on. The Order was sternly ruled—sternly in especial when any wayfarer or stranger was present; it had a great fame for sanctity, and that odorous reputation went far to cover any whispers that might steal abroad of other and less holy uses to which its highest director might turn it. "Great Heaven!" thought Erceldoune, as he glanced down the long table at the close-shaven, silent guests that surrounded it, while his hand went instinctively to the abundant falling masses of the silken hair that

covered his chest, "can living, breathing men—men in their youth and their strength—exist like that?"

His thoughts swept over the many varying years of his own life, so full of color, of peril, of adventure, of change; of wandering in divers lands, of danger in deserts and on seas, of pleasure in countless cities, of world-wide range of travel, of communion with every nation, of gay nights in western palaces, of wild rides through eastern heats;—and then men lived like this, while all the earth was free to them!

He spoke to none of them; he bore them a fiery hate because they were her priestly jailers, and even so much needful reticence as lay in breaking the bread of these men under a false semblance, while the intent to deliver their captive was hidden in his heart, savored too much of a taint like treachery not to be bitter to him, imperative as it was in her service, and just as it was in its employ and errand.

To Erceldoune it were far easier to deal a straight swift stroke, such as that with which men of his race had felled Paynim foe or Southern invader, than to carry through anything that involved a touch of what looked to him like deception. His life had brought him into many critical moments when silence, acuteness, and caution had been as compulsory as hot action and reckless daring; and he had never been found wanting in them. But the rush of a lion, the swoop of an eagle, were more his instinct and his warfare; and he chafed feverishly under this part that he played for her sake in the Italian monastery.

The supper was brief; he had hoped the monks might be, as he had known many, laughter-loving riotous brethren, gossips in their cups, and not averse to heavy libations, from whom he might have gleaned some hint or knowledge of her. They were not; a cold, still, harsh asceticism brooded over them; they were chiefly saturnine, worn, impassive men, whose faces were chill and unreadable as masks of stone; there was nothing to give a suspicion that anything, save the severest form of religious devotion and abstinence, reigned there—nothing to hint that there was a prisoner within their keeping. There was not one from whom he could expect to extract any

hope, except the poor porter and water-carrier, on whose round jocund face not even the silence and the hard labor of his life could impress either spirituality or resignation.

The monks filed slowly out of the dark, narrow, vaulted hall; the Umbrian and one other remained to clear away the remnants of the meal.

"Will you take this to your dog?" said the priest, as he heaped up the remnants. "You did well not to bring him here; the Superior would not have loved so big a brute."

"Thanks," said Erceldoune, as he took some broken food; "and do you come to my cell, good father, I have something more cheering in my flask than your water and goat's milk."

The Umbrian's eyes glistened with delight, though a shadow of grievous disappointment stole quickly over his features.

"Another night, my son—to-morrow night I shall be free," he whispered. "This evening I must attend the offices. You know your way back, and you can undress by moonlight? We have no other light, save in the chapel."

Erceldoune, wearily enough, nodded assent, and with a brief word of thanks paced through the long passages to his dormitory. He could do no more; he must wait and watch, and be content that he was near her. He could not tell in what part of the building she was lodged; he must await time to learn that, and learn the means to reach her. With the morrow he might bribe, or stupefy the Umbrian with drink, till he reached his confidence; for the present there was nothing for it, without exciting suspicion, except to remain in the sleeping-place allotted him, and labor afresh for them with the dawn.

The little slit, unglazed and narrow as a hand's breadth, through which the luminous silver moon poured down, was high above his head; he swung himself upward and looked out: the waters and marshy plains, with the dark belt of cypress afar off, slept calmly in the white and glistening night; all was very still, only broken by the cry of a water-bird, the rush of an aziola, or the hoot of an owl. As he gazed, the outer bolt of the stone door of his cell

was drawn sharply and swiftly; he dropped to his feet with an oath.

"Do not blaspheme, my son," said the Umbrian's voice through a chink. "It is only our custom with strangers."

He was a prisoner for the whole length of the summer night.

Well—the prison was hers; it was something to share it.

He undressed, laid his pistols ready loaded by his side, drank thirstily of the cool water with which the pitcher had been refilled, and threw himself on the dry grasses, with his arm flung round the hound's neck; they were comrades—they were both here to save her.

He lay long gazing at the glimpse of starry sky that gleamed above, while the chimes tolled slowly from the bell-tower of the Cistercian monastery, and the moonlight poured down on to his mighty limbs stretched there in rest, and the gladiator breadth of the vast uncovered chest; only to know that he was beneath the same roof with her through the long silent hours, made his brain giddy, his heart on fire.

It was very long before at length a fitful, restless, dreamy sleep came to him.

CHAPTER XXIV.

LION AND LEOPARD.

With the first break of the dawn, freed by his Umbrian friend, he went back to his work on the waters; the cool long hours were precious for labor, and he desired so to gratify and serve them, that the brethren should be loth to lose his services. He was thankful that he was given liberty at all with the sunrise. When the bolt of his cell had been drawn, a horror of dread had stolen on him that his errand was suspected, and that he was trapped, like a fox in a keeper's gins.

The morning was balmy, clear, and beautiful; even the naked wastes and smoking marshes looked brighter in its light, and he went forth with the scythe, and the nets, and the lines across his shoulder, and the hound following close in his path. He had strapped his gold about his waist, and he brought the dog with him. The hound's eyes asked, with as much eloquence as human lips ever framed, to be allowed to seek out his mistress; but he was perfectly trained, and he understood at a glance that the time for his search of her had not yet come. As Erceldoune descended the steep incline of rock-steps, he glanced up at the lancet window at which yesterday he had seen the woman who was the single thought and idol of his life; she was not there. Though he knew nothing of it, her prison-chamber had been changed for one in which there was no casement—one to which light and air only strayed through by a score of circular holes pierced in the stonework, high above the reach of her gaze; a chamber on which no eyes could look, from which no cries could be heard. His heart sank at the dark vacancy which was alone seen through the bars, whence a few hours before her eyes had dwelt on him, from which she had watched him all through the length of the previous day. It was bitter work so to rein in his impulse, that he did not rush blindly into the den where she was hidden, and see what a sure shot and a merciless blow could do to free her. He choked the longing down as best he could; he knew there were seventy men there who would swing the ponderous gates to on him, and shut in with him forever every chance of rescue for her; he knew that the only hope for her, or for himself, lay in the course he now pursued; and he went out to his toil. There was abundance both of sport and of labor in those wild marshes and ill-preserved pools to have occupied for months one who brought to them the lore and the skill of Scottish moorlands, and he returned to them with unflagging pertinacity, mowing down the osiers, slinging the teal, and widgeon, and mallards, reckless of season so long as they served to fill the monks' buttery; stretching the nets and thrashing the sedges till the frightened fish swam in by the score; working through hour on hour till the Umbrian brought him his mess of breakfast-soup,

and some tough cakes of rye, and sat down beside him under the stunted cypresses, gazing with devouring, delighted eyes at the stores of food laid upon the banks.

"Thanks, father; but that is a poor breakfast for either of us. See here; I have done better than you," said Erceldoune, as he stooped over a fire he had lit with the touchwood, and broke the clay covering off two succulent water-birds and half a dozen dainty trout, that he had baked in a sportsman's fashion, practiced many a time in Canadian woods, and Kansas wilds, and Thuringian forests, and Australian deserts. The eyes of the monk glittered with glee; he dearly loved savory food, and abstinence was a sore trial to him.

"Eat of them as you will," said Erceldoune, as he laid them on the slab of rock that served as a table. "They are better than rye bread, at any rate; and if you fear the brethren, not a soul can see you here. You seem very strict in your Order?"

The Umbrian sighed, and shook his little brown bullet head, while he betook himself to the precious banquet in silence.

"Yet you have a woman in your holy walls?"

He spoke abruptly; it was fearful to him to speak of her, and he could have better loved to force the answer out by a sterner mode than words.

The Umbrian started, and flushed guiltily.

"Nay, my son, you make a strange error. By all the saints of the calendar, nothing feminine ever——"

"Spare your perjuries, father. I saw her yonder."

He motioned his head backward to the frowning wall behind them; his pulses beat like sledge-hammers as he spoke.

The Umbrian hung his head, and hastily gobbled up a liver wing.

"A delusion of the eye—a snare of the senses, my son. May be your thoughts run too much upon women."

Erceldoune swept the board bare of all the untasted fare.

"By my faith, you are a good comrade. I have brandy that will make you dream yourself in paradise, and we would have had a carouse with it to-night; but since you

tell me such lies, when my own eyes saw her yonder, you shall have no drop of the cognac as long as you live, and every fish I have heaped on these banks I will fling back in the lakes again, and leave you to fill your own buttery as you best may!"

The Umbrian, terrified and aghast at what he had lost, seized the ends of his companion's sash imploringly:

"Oh, my son! do not be so rash. Set down the good food; to waste it is a sin. You did see her; you are right. But, for pity's sake, never breathe it."

"What is she, then?" asked Erceldoune, as he gave back the birds and trout, that had served him so well, into the eager hands of the monk. "And why should you deny it? except that priests always deny any truth."

"She is a prisoner, and a rebel; and you should not blaspheme."

"Whose prisoner?"

"The king's, my son."

"The king's! Has he no prisons of his own, then, that he must borrow your convent?"

The Umbrian hesitated; he was sore afraid to answer the question, but he was more immediately afraid that his impetuous questioner should sweep his meal away again.

"Monsignore Villaflor is interested in her recovery to the One Faith, my son," he said, slowly and unwillingly.

"Giulio Villaflor!" The words leaped from his lips ere he knew they were spoken; the blood rushed into his face, his hands clinched; the name confirmed his worst horror, his worst dread. He knew the temper and the repute of the mighty Italian; he shivered where he stood in the hot sun.

"What do you know of our holy father in God, my son?"

Erceldoune turned his eyes full on him.

"What do *you* know?"

The other flushed shamefacedly; he was an honest peasant in his way, to whom the mask of sanctity was very irksome, and the great ecclesiastic, and the uses to which the monastery was put, had alike cruelly gone against his simple instincts of a just life.

"You must not question me, my son; I know nothing—nothing save to obey the little I am ever told."

"What are you told of this captive, then?"

"That she is a skeptic and a revolutionist; a very evil and fatal woman."

"And his Holiness of Villaflor, out of his divine love, wishes to reclaim her into the bosom of the Church!"

The words were hot and acrid as they were hurled through his set teeth: it was all he could do to keep any chain on them.

The Umbrian winced under their sting.

"Surely, my son. It would be well that she should be reclaimed. But, of a truth——"

"What? Can a priest speak truth?"

"Hush, my son; you must not be so bitter upon the appointed of God. I was going to say"—the monk played restlessly with the savory bones he had been crunching, and the color burnt in his yellow cheek, as his voice sank low, and his eyes glanced around furtively—"whether it was sorcery given her by the Evil One or no I cannot tell, but there was such a look in her eyes—ah, Madonna, she has a fearful beauty!—that when they bade me scourge her for contumacy, the lash dropped from my hands; I was as one paralyzed. I could not. I could not!"

With a cry as though the scourge came on him, cutting into the livid flesh, Erceldoune sprang to his feet; his hands fell on the Cistercian's shoulders, swaying him to and fro.

"Scourged her?—scourged her? O God! they never dared——"

"I dared not," muttered the Umbrian, sorely in fear; "they were bitter upon me, but they did not force it—then. She will have the punishment to-morrow if she have not yielded——"

"Yielded to what?"

"Yielded to the persuasions of the Church, my son."

Erceldoune flung him off with a force that made the Umbrian's blood run cold.

"Yielded to the passions of Giulio Villaflor, you mean! You hell-hounds!—you fiends!"

His voice choked in his throat; the muscles of his chest,

where the fishing-shirt was open, swelled convulsively; he felt blind with rage and agony; the monk watched him in wonder.

"The sight of her beauty beyond those bars has stirred you strangely, my son. Verily, she is a sorceress, as they say. You feel marvelously for a strange woman."

Erceldoune shook in every limb with the effort to control what, betrayed, must betray both her and him.

"That she *is* a woman, and you are brutes, is enough! What man that had not the heart of a cur could hear such infamy and keep his peace? It is well the lash dropped from your hands, or I would have shaken life out of you where you stand!"

The Umbrian gave a shudder.

"Truly you could do it, for you are a son of Anak! I must leave you now; I am due with the Almoner; and as for that little matter of the brandy, I will come to your cell after supper, if you be still in the mind."

He made his way back with speed, anxious to get out of reach of this unchained lion; and Erceldoune stood alone in the hot sun-scorch, with shivers of fire and of ice, turn by turn, in his veins.

Whatever could be done for her must be done swiftly, or it would be too late.

Across the pitiless clearness of the transparent air there was alone in the arid wastes about him the figure of a pifferaro, a mere lad, singing a barcarolle, whose burden was borne musically and wildly over the marshes as he toiled on his way with his monkey on his shoulder. With lightning quickness, Erceldoune, keeping out of the sight of the monastery casements, waded through shallow pools and dashed through thickets of osier, till he reached the boy, a bright-eyed, bright-witted Savoyard, with a dirty, tattered sheepskin for clothing, and a little ape for a comrade, and a light childish heart that made him happier than a king. Erceldoune glanced at him, and saw intelligence and frankness both in the arch, brown ruddy face of the little bohemian; he stopped him as the boy was leaping from tuft to tuft of the rank grass that studded the shaking quagmires, and stretched his hand out with a broad gold coin.

"Had you ever so much in your life?"

The Savoyard opened wide his keen, dancing black eyes.

"Never! Of a truth, *signor barcarolo*, if that is the fish you angle out of these pools, your craft's a thriving one!"

"You shall get just such fish yourself if you choose. Will you go on an errand for me? You shall have this coin as you start, if you will, and ten like it when you come back and show me the errand is done."

The pifferaro stretched out his little tanned hand.

"Give it here," he said, laconically. "The errand is done."

Erceldoune tossed him the gold.

"The errand is this. Do you know Ferratino?"

The boy nodded assent.

"Go thither, then; quick as a lapwing, straight as a crow flies. Run, as if you ran for your life. Take a paper I will give you to the villa, and say it is for his Excellency the Baron; he will send word by you, yes or no. Bring the word to me here, truly and instantly, and you shall have ten of those pieces, I promise you. Can you do the distance? It is far."

The Savoyard laughed, his bright eyes all glittering with eager zest.

"I have done farther for a dozen bajocchi! You shall have your answer as fast as a pigeon could bring it. Give me the paper. I shall find you here?"

"Yes. On these waters. Wait a second while I write, and then be off like the wind."

As he spoke, he tore a leaf out of a pocket-book in which his circular notes had been sent from the yacht, and wrote with its pencil a few rapid lines; they were simply in German:

"DEAR ANSELM,—I am in pressing need. Send me at nightfall two of the fastest horses you have; let some boy ride them who cannot speak a word of Italian, and wait with them, unseen, in the cypress grove under the monastery of Taverna—wait all night till he sees me. Do no more than I ask, for God's sake. I know I need not say grant my request; our alliance is too old and too sure.

Forgive all that sounds strange and vague in this, and send me simply word, 'yes' or 'no,' by the Savoyard.

"Yours ever,

"FULKE ERCELDOUNE."

Men of his temperament make firm and warm friendships among men. The Hungarian noble to whom he wrote, and who, as he had remembered, occupied a villa some dozen miles from the wastes in which he stood, was a generous, reckless man of pleasure, who, he knew well, would have done far greater things than this at his entreaty, and would have the sagacity to do as he asked, and no more. Ernst von Anselm and he had once passed through a mad night together on the burning decks of a ship in the midst of the broad Pacific, when mutiny and drunkenness in a Lascar crew had added their horrors to the pandemonium; and together, back to back, against a legion of devils, and in the red-hot glare of leaping flames, had sent their bullets through the ringleaders' brains, and saved the vessel alike from fire and from anarchy. From that hour they had been friends, true and close and tried, in that noble friendship of brethren, which is worth all the love of women.

The little pifferaro, flinging his ape over his shoulder, where it gripped a sure hold, darted off, over the dreary plain, as he had promised, as fast as a pigeon could fly: that broad gold coin locked in his hand, and the promise of ten more like it, lent him the speed of a desert pony. "I shall go back a millionnaire to my people!" thought the child in his glee. There was hardly so much money in the whole of the little hamlet that had given him birth, where it nestled in a sleepy hollow under the brown hills of Savoy.

Erceldoune looked after him a second,—the careless child was a frail little basket-boat to launch on such stormy waters weighted with the fate of two lives! Then he went back to the work of the monastery, laboring all through the noon-heat among the sedges and the still shallow yellow lagunes, working as men only work when in that ardor of physical toil, that restless bodily exertion, they give vent to the thoughts which, if they paused to muse a moment,

would unman and madden them. He felt as if the hours would never move; the sun seemed to stand still; the blazing radiance of the day had a sickening oppression;—what might she not be bidden to suffer in it!

He knew the temper of Giulio Villaflor, that leopard of the velvet skin and of the unsparing fangs. He shuddered as he looked on the rugged silent pile, that kept her chained for such a tyrant. He had never fancied that the world could hold such agony as those burning, endless, intolerable hours brought him, as he plunged down eagerly into the coolness of the waters to chill the torture in him, and labored to kill thought under the burden of corporeal fatigue, under the fever of ceaseless activity.

The day grew on; noon came and passed; the glow of light lay clear and golden over the plain and the breadth of the sheeted water; the hours were tolled monotonously from the campanila, ever and again the drone of the monks' voices rising in regular diapason, in chant or office, swelled through the narrow apertures of their chapel casements, and echoed with melancholy rise and fall over the silence. When he heard it, deadlier oaths than his lips had ever breathed were hurled over the slumbering pools at the priestly formulas that sheltered a Nero's cruelties, a Borgia's lusts. Once or twice a peasant or a muleteer passed across the horizon line: otherwise there was nothing to break the eternal sameness of the glittering sunlight, the sear country, the cypress points cutting so sharply against the intense blue of the sky. He knew what men had felt who had lost their reason through a captivity that made them dwell in one unending solitude—look on one unchanging scene.

The deep radiance of color that precedes the sunset was just flushing earth and sky, as the shrill hoot of an owl's note pierced his ear—a night-bird's cry in the sunshine. He guessed at once that it was a signal of the little piffero, and followed it. Under the reeds, some half mile or less from the monastery, the boy was crouched, panting like a tired dog, but glowing with life and zest and eagerness as he lifted his hot brown face.

"I have done it," he cried, with all a child's exultation. "Here is your answer—written. Stay here, lest the crows

yonder should spy on us. Let priests smell gold, and it's all up with him who owns it."

Erceldoune took the paper and read it, lying there under the shelter of the sedges. It was in German; the Baron was from home, but an old lackey, who had chanced to be the first to greet the Savoyard, seeing an open scroll, and, pressed by the boy's urgency, had read it, had hesitated at first what to do in his master's absence, but, knowing how well Anselm loved the writer, had known he should run no risk by compliance, and might by refusal risk much displeasure. He wrote now in reply, with sagacity and foresight, promising that the horses should be in waiting at nightfall with a lad to hold them, and that as they would be something worn by the transit, another pair should be in readiness at the gates of Ferratino in case Erceldoune's errand should bear him near, which in all likelihood it might, since all things must pass by there to reach the road to the shore.

His hand shook with joy as he read, and scattered the old man's tremulously-written characters in fragments lest they should tell tales. So far the means for flight were secured, could her freedom be compassed. He had not much gold about him, but he gave double the fee to the little pifferaro, while the child stared in amaze at the twenty shining yellow pieces. He caught them greedily, yet when he had them he was half stupefied with the enormity of his possessions.

"The pastor, and the bailiff, and the innkeeper never had more than that all put together!" he murmured, his thoughts drifting to the village of his birth, with its little steeple hidden under chestnut leaves, and its mild-eyed herds browsing on the green breadths between the rocks. "That is no *barcarolo;* and, whatever the mischief is, I will be bound there is a woman in it," considered the shrewd little lad as he went on his way, the gold safe in the bosom of his sheepskin shirt.

With the dead mallards and teal flung over his shoulder, and with a great osier-basket of fish filled to overflowing, Erceldoune passed, unsummoned, from the lake side up the rock, and to the monastery gates. He thought they might make question of letting him enter for a second night's

lodging, and without entrance all hope of her rescue was ended. The Umbrian, however, who through the grating saw the abundance brought in for the larder, admitted him instantly, with many praises of his industry and adorations of his skill.

"You have a heavy door there?" said Erceldoune, turning to glance at the ponderous mass of iron-clamped oak that swung slowly behind him.

"Ah—heavy indeed!" sighed the Cistercian, as he stooped to draw the huge bolts, which were only drawn stiffly and with effort into their sockets. "It is heavy enough, but it is these are the misery."

"These? I will soon make them run smoother. I have something of a smith's skill. Fetch me a file and a little oil."

The Umbrian fetched them gladly, marveling what manner of man this was who knew every craft under the sun. A little while, and the rusted iron ran noiselessly and smoothly in their massive channels; the monk's lament had given him an opportunity more precious than any other could have been in that moment, and in easing the run of the bolts for the gatekeeper's indolence, he paved the way to a facile exit by night from the monastery, if by any means he could also obtain the great key that swung from the Umbrian's girdle.

"You have a wonderful science, my son," said the Cistercian, with musing amaze. "You can do all things that you turn your hand to, it seems!"

"I have lived in many countries and with many men."

"You must have been more than a mere *barcarolo*, my son?"

"I told you I have been a 'wanderer' from my birth," said Erceldoune, with a smile at the play on the Celtic meaning of his nationality. "The career is a bad one for gold, but it is the best in the world, I fancy, for learning self-help and other men's virtues."

"But you must learn much vice, too, my son?"

Erceldoune shrugged his shoulders.

"What of that? Vice is a good teacher too, in its way, and one must take the warp with the woof."

"But, you know, one cannot touch pitch, my son, and keep undefiled."

Erceldoune laughed a little.

"Good father, where is the man that ever did keep so? And as for that, the pitch will not stay long unless the surface be ready for it. But, for Heaven's sake, chatter no more; I love speech little at any time, and now—I am famished."

"Truly you have earned your supper; and—as for that little matter of brandy? I have not tasted a drop since I was in Naples, seven seasons ago!"

"All right. I have the best cognac in a flask here; if you come to my cell after supper, you shall be heartily welcome to a draught of it."

The monk's eyes sparkled with glee; he nodded a hasty assent, and, relieving his guest of the fish and the birds, took him for the second time to the refectory. The same silence, the same rigor, the same fare prevailed; the same double line of lean, immutable, saturnine, emaciated faces were in the dim light of the stone hall; the same swift upward glance was cast on him as he entered; the same abstracted severity of repose was observed throughout the meal. He had no wish to break it; only for her sake could he so far restrain the hatred in him toward the men who were her torturers and her captor's tools, as to share their bread, justly as he had earned it, and to sit in such semblance of amity with them as lay in this compulsory companionship. Some among them noted that there was a dark shadow on the strange *barcarolo's* face that had not been there so deeply on the previous day, and the monk nearest him heard a heavy oath muttered under the waves of his beard when the blessing before the refection was chanted; it was a curse on those who covered the lusts of a velvet-voiced priest with the savor of sanctity, with the odor of rituals. Often, moreover, his passionate eyes flashed over the countenances around him, seeking to read by instinct which among them was the brute who had dared bid the lash be raised against her: had he known, scarce every memory of the prudence and the abstinence needful for her sake would have availed to chain back his arm from a blow that would have felled the offender level with the flags of the stone floor.

The meal ended, a fresh torture waited him; the Supe-

rior summoned him to the head of the table, and held a long converse with him, the rambling verbosity of old age combined, in the incessant vagaries of his interrogation, with the subtle veiled promptings of curiosity and cunning. There was that in the bearing and the glance of the stranger they harbored which made the priests uneasily suspect that this was too bold a lion for their episcopal lord to welcome were he aware of the shelter they gave. Erceldoune saw the suspicion, and saw that he must allay it, or all hope of sufficient freedom for the purpose he held would be forever denied him. With an effort which cost him far more than any physical toil or bodily strain could have ever done, he forced himself into the part it was imperative to play. Lie he would not, not even for her; and reserve, he saw, would confirm all the doubts rising in the breasts of his jailers and auditors; he cast himself into a bolder venture. "These men," he reckoned, with a swift glance over them, "must be of two classes only—those who have forsaken the world, and those who have never known it; to hear of it will enchain equally those for whom it is a lost land and those to whom it is an unknown one." On that rapid inference he acted. In answer to the Superior's questions he told his life frankly; changing it in little, save that they deemed his travel had been the travel of a restless bohemian—a man poor enough to have been glad at times to serve before the mast.

Though he was averse to many words usually, he could speak with a vivid and impressive eloquence when the fire of it was struck alight in him. He forced himself to speak so here. He answered, as one who would tell his adventures, without pressure or concealment; and after the brevity of his previous curt replies, the monks heard the picturesque flow of his swift Italian with the same amaze with which they regarded the stature, the strength, the sinewy limbs, the sweeping beard, and the careless royalty of bearing of this athlete, who came among them as though to show them all that this manhood, which they had crucified and buried in their own lives as an unholy and accursed thing, might be and might enjoy. His past had been full of ever-changing scenes and experiences; hairbreadth escapes, desperate dangers, wild adventure, and

keen perils, had been continually his portion in the distant and intricate missions on which he was sent. A struggle of life and death in the heart of Persia had been followed by dreamy barbaric luxury and magnificence in the midst of Mexican palaces; a death-ride through Russian snow-storms, with the baying pack of starving wolves on his track through the whole of a bitter icy night, had been succeeded by months of gayety in the capitals of Europe; a shipwreck in the midst of the Indian Ocean, with a Malay crew ripe for murder, and an open boat living for days on tempestuous seas in the glare of a tropic sun, with men around him dying like dogs for water, had been effaced almost as soon as endured by the brilliant fiery pleasures of a volunteer service with the French cavalry in a campaign against the Arabs, or a desert quest for desert game over the wild Libyan tracks in the sultry glories of autumn days and nights, by a season's sojourn in some friend's summer-palace among the roses of Damascus, or in the ruby glow of the Nile suns, painting, shooting, swimming, boating, finding ever and everywhere the happiness of fearless, fetterless, vivid sense of life, oftentimes nomadic and glad in the mere gladness of strength in the desert chief's mere liberty, with

. . . . "the rich dates yellow'd over with gold-dust divine,
And the locust's flesh steep'd in the pitcher, the full draught of wine,
And the sleep in the dried river channel, where bulrushes tell
That the water was wont to go warbling so softly and well."

The memories even of a single year supplied him with a thousand sources from which to draw pictures of varied scenes, whose recital entranced imperceptibly and unconsciously first one and then another of his auditors, till the whole circle of the monks stood around as men in the East will stand around the narrator who tells of far countries and of strange fortunes, while the narghilé vapors out, and the coffee steams fragrantly in the open divan, and the grave Mussulmen stroke their beards in silent wonder.

It entranced them, these recitals of worlds unknown and joys as of dangers undreamed of. When he paused, the Father Superior pressed him eagerly for more; those bold, terse, picturesque words that drew them sketches of differ-

ent lands and unimagined pleasures with the same rich vigorous sweep as that with which his hand would paint tropic foliage and mountain outline, the stretch of seas and the burning warmth of sun-tanned prairie, held the priestly circle spell-bound. Those who had known no existence save that of the cloister from their youth up, heard with an entranced, stupefied amaze, as children hear tales of genii; those who had come to the cloister only when every hope of life had been bruised, and wrung, and killed, heard with a terrible pained look of hunger on their faces, as exiles hear a strain of melody which brings them back the songs of the land they have lost forever. Both alike hung on the swift flow of the descriptive words, only more warmly colored by the Neapolitan idiom he still employed, as on some tale of paradise; the worn sallow cheeks flushed, the deadened lusterless eyes flashed, the dropped veiled glance was lifted eagerly, the thin and silent lips were parted with rapid breaths, and once a sigh broke from a monk still in the years of youth—a sigh so bitter, so intense in its anguish of vain lament, that a whole broken, wasted life seemed spent in it.

Never again would they be as they had been ere this wanderer had come amid them; through him they saw all that they had lost forever.

He had conquered them. When they parted, and he went on his way to his cell, there was not a doubt of him lingering in any heart, there was not a man who had one thought left with him save of that glory of manhood, that splendor of liberty, that beauty of unknown worlds which they had voluntarily surrendered and buried from themselves till the death of the grave should release them from the death of the monastery.

"Come," he whispered, as he passed the Umbrian, "and if you can bring lemons, sugar, and spices with you, you shall dream yourself in paradise to-night."

"Hush, my dear son; do not be so profane!" murmured the other, while his eyes danced in expectant ecstasy. "I will come, and bring the things, if I can, from the buttery. Your tales were beautiful, but I thought the Superior would never have let you go!"

"Great heaven! to save my own life I would not stoop

to dupe and bribe these brutes as I do for hers!" thought Erceldoune, where he leaned on the stone ledge of his cell-window awaiting the monk. It was very bitter to him, this truce with her enemies, this false play with these ecclesiastics. The soldier-like frankness and the proud honesty of his nature rebelled irrepressibly at the dissimulation he was driven to match them with thus. To lead a charge through the heat of battle, as he had done in Mexico and Algeria more than once, when the chiefs had been shot down, or to imperil his life against all odds in a deadly contest with overpowering numbers, as had chanced to him in Persian defiles and Argentine revolutions, was far more suited to his temper and his instincts than the part that, for her sake, fell to him in these cloisters of Taverna. Yet played out the part must be, or she would be beyond rescue, beyond hope.

It was not long before the Umbrian made his stealthy entrance, with the treasures of the buttery hidden under his frock.

Erceldoune in silence took the things from him. His own flask was large and full of brandy, strong as fire and mellow as oil; he emptied out half the water of his pitcher, tossed the whole of the cognac in instead, and with the spices, lemons, and sugar, made a fragrant and intoxicating drink. The Umbrian, squatted on the dry grasses of the bed, watched its preparation with thirsty, devouring eyes.

"He will be dead drunk before this is half empty," thought Erceldoune.

"There, tell me if that is not better than sour wines and rancid goat's milk," he asked, as he poured some into the little drinking horn the monk had brought. It was swallowed in an ecstasy; the Umbrian had no need to dream of paradise; he was in it the moment the strong, odorous draught touched his lips. As fast as he stretched the horn out, so fast his host filled it; the pitcher held more than a quart, and Erceldoune scarcely drank himself, though he made a feint of so doing; he did not yet know how much or how little would be needed to steep the Italian in the slumberous intoxication he required to produce. As he had imagined, the first few draughts rose straight to the brain of the recluse, who, well as he loved it, had not

tasted any alcohol for years; the luscious, fiery, highly-spiced liquid quickly flushed his face, and whirled his thoughts, and loosened his always loquacious tongue; he sat with the jovial content of a Sancho Panza, laughing, chattering, heeding very little what replies he had, and very rapidly forgetting all things except the tender of his horn for its replenishing. Erceldoune sought first to make him garrulous, so that he might glean intelligence from his drunken verbiage. The Umbrian's idle tergiversation of speech soon wandered off to the captive of their clerical bondage—wandered to such ardent maudlin ecstasies on the subject of her beauty, that his hearer suffered tortures as he listened perforce to the profanation. Erceldoune flung himself down on the flag floor, resting on his elbow, in such enforced stillness as he could command, while the rambling fervor of the gluttonous Brother desecrated her name and catalogued her charms; happily, the drinker was too giddy with his potations to notice the shudder that every now and then at his hottest epithets of descriptive admiration shook his listener's limbs, or the flash that darted over him from his hearer's eagle eyes when he betrayed, in his unconscious loquacity, the purpose of her imprisonment in the Cistercian sanctuary.

It needed no questions to elicit all he knew; the brandy fumes rising over his brain undid all caution it had ever been taught, and spread out all its shreds of knowledge as a peddler spreads his wares. Erceldoune heard enough to convulse him with horror as he was stretched there on the naked stone, with the luster of the Italian night finding its way dimly through the aperture above;—enough to know that he must rescue her to-night, or never.

"And I will tell you more," hiccoughed the monk, laughing low and cunningly, too blind with drink to have much knowledge left of whom he spoke to or of where he was. "Monsignore comes to-night—he often visits us, you know; we are his special children, and it has a fair odor for so great a man to leave the world for such holy, rigorous retirement!"

"To-night!"

Erceldoune sprang to his feet as a lion springs from its lair; the priest's villainous chuckle rang like a rattlesnake

in his ear; in his cups the Umbrian was but an animal—a very low one to boot—and the better instincts which had moved him when the lash had dropped from his hand were drowned and dead.

"Ay, to-night!" laughed the monk, while his head hung on one side, and his eyes closed with the fatuous cunning of intoxication; "he comes for the last time—do you mark me?—for the last time!"

The oath that shook the stone walls thrilled even through the mists of drink and the imbecility of his dulled brain, as it was hurled from his hearer's lips; an agony was in it such as mere grief never spoke yet. The Umbrian, sobered by it for the moment, shuddered and strove to rise, looking about him with blind, terrified eyes.

"What have I said? What have I done?" he muttered, piteously. "Ah, Jesu! Monsignore—Monsignore!"

And with that last dread name on his lips he fell back stupefied, rocking himself to and fro, and sobbing like a child.

Erceldoune neither saw nor heard him; he stood like a statue, his hands clinched, his face dyed crimson, the black veins swollen on his forehead and his throat, his breath caught in savage, stifled gasps, his bared chest heaving like the flanks of a snared animal.

"To-night!—to-night!"

The words rattled in his chest with a curse that would have chilled even the bold blood of his mighty rival.

The Umbrian sat motionless, staring at him with distended, senseless eyes; he was filled with a great terror, but the terror was vague, and his mind seemed to swim in vapor. Erceldoune cast one glance at him, and by sheer instinct forced the vessel, still half filled with the liquid, into his hands.

"Drink!" he said, fiercely; "drink, and be a beast at once."

The monk, with whom there was but one sense left, that of desire for the alcohol that destroyed him, seized it thirstily, and drank—drank—drank—till the fiery stream flowed down his throat like water. Erceldoune watched him with eager, aching eyes; every moment seemed an eternity, every thought maddened him till he felt like a

desert brute; he could not stir till this priest lay senseless before him.

He paced the narrow limits of his cell like a caged lion, his face dark as night, his heart panting till its throbs sounded through the stillness, his breast heaving till the loose light folds of the fishing-shirt felt like a case of iron, his gaze never leaving the obese wavering figure of the stupefied Italian, who followed his movement with a dizzy, blinded sight that grew dimmer and dimmer with every moment that the brandy rose over his brain like waves that washed all lingering sense away.

At last the pitcher dropped with a crash from hands that lost all power; a vacuous laugh sounded a moment in the Umbrian's throat; his eyes stared senselessly at the slender silver cimeter of the young moon that shone through the slit of the casement, then their lids closed, his head fell back, he lay like a log of wood on the pallet—unconscious, sightless, dead drunk.

Erceldoune stooped over him, and forced his eyelids up; by the look of the eyeballs beneath he saw that this was no feint, but the deep-drugged sleep of intoxication that would be unbroken for a score of hours, whose stupor made the man it had enchained powerless as a stone, brainless as a hog, deaf to all sound, insensible of all existence; he wanted no more.

With his knife he slashed noiselessly the band of the great keys that swung at the monk's girdle, and fastened them on his own, so muffled that they would make no sound as he moved. He looked at his pistols, and put them back in his sash ready sprung; they were double-barreled revolvers, that carried sure death in their tubes. Then he laid his hand on the hound's collar, led him without, closed the door, and drew its bolts, locking in the Umbrian.

The dormitory was quite dark; not even the moon's rays strayed into its narrow black aisle of stone, with the double line of cells flanking its length; a single footfall overheard, a single echo sounding down the silence, and the sleeping monks would pour out of their lairs upon him. While waiting, he had bound his feet with withes of hay, so that they fell noiselessly on the pavement; and the

hound stole softly on, as he had been bred to steal on a roebuck's slot or a brigand's track. The first thing Erceldoune sought was to make the road free to leave the building; he found his way, that he had carefully noted as he came, back to the great entrance. The whole place was still; there was not a sound; he passed uninterruptedly to the vaulted gate-passage. Here a single oil-lamp burned, its light dully shed on the broad low oak door, with its iron cramps and fastenings. He drew back the bolts gently, and turned the keys in the two ponderous locks; the door would open now at a touch. He motioned to the hound to wait and guard it; the dog understood the trust, and couched motionless as though cast in bronze; a truer or a bolder sentinel could not be placed there, and it was not for the first time that the brave sagacious Servian monarch had been trusted in a crisis of life or death. Then rapidly, and with the light, swift tread of a deer, Erceldoune retraced his steps; he had but the shadowy, rambling information of the monk to guide him to where Idalia was, but he knew, by that, that she was in the westward wing of the monastery, and he made his way there through the thick darkness about him, and down the stone passages winding one in another. It was all so still; he thought the story of the drunken Italian must have been a drink-inspired dream.

And yet—men who came for shame would come in silence and in secret; his hand was on his pistols as he went, his limbs shook as he traversed the interminable gloom, a hot joy, a terrible torture, were on him; he went to save her—and he might be too late.

He had found his way into what, as far as he could judge, was the western part, close on the chapel which the Umbrian had spoken of as the place of her fresh lodgment. Here, also, the darkness was unbroken; he could not pierce it to see a yard in advance; he felt the rough cold stone of the wall against his hand; he felt by the greater chillness of the air that no ray of daylight ever penetrated; he paused a moment, tempted at all risk of discovery to return and fetch the dog to track her. At that instant his eyes caught a faint narrow thread of light, pale and close to the floor—the light, doubtless, of a chamber

within glimmering above the door sill; he made his way toward it, careless what hand might be stretched out to arrest his course; before he reached it, the sweet imperial tones of a voice that thrilled him like an electric touch rang through the solitude.

"Back!—or your life or mine ends. It matters little which!"

The voice was clear as a bell and rich as music, but it vibrated with a meaning that struck like steel to the heart of the man who loved her;—it told him all.

With the force of a giant he threw himself against the door, guided to it by the light that gleamed beneath against the stones. Passion lent him herculean strength; the bar within was drawn, but the weight of his pressure suddenly flung on the panels sent both bolts and sockets back, wrenched from their fastenings, while the wood was shivered beneath the crash, and a dusky yellow light flared in his eyes from the cell within.

Across the broken half of the door still jammed by its staples to the floor he saw Idalia; such light as there was, was on her where she stood close pressed to the bare stone wall, an agony upon her face, but an agony that had in it loathing and scorn unutterable, and had even now no touch of fear; the rich-hued draperies of her mask-dress were torn, as though she had just wrenched herself free from some polluting grasp; her hair was loosened, and against the fairness of her bosom she held clinched the slender blade of the Venetian stiletto, its point turned inward against her heart. Above her stood the magnificence of her great tyrant's lofty form.

As the bolts broke, and the splintered beechwood flew in fragments, Giulio Villaflor swept round, his forehead red, his eyes alight with a Borgia's fury of baffled and licentious love—an amazed rage on him at the stranger who dared stand between him and his captive, between him and his will. With one glance, in which his gaze met hers —with a lion's spring, Erceldoune was on the mighty prelate, his hand at the other's throat, as a forest hound's fangs fasten in a wolf's; the shock of the sudden collision dragged the Italian back staggering and breathless; ere he heard or saw his antagonist, the sinewy arms crushed

him, and the reckless violence tore him away. Then that sheer blood-instinct woke in Villaflor which wakes with the first sense of conflict in all men not cowards from their birth; he closed with his unknown foe, whose gripe was at his throat, holding him powerless.

Not a word was breathed, yet both knew—strangers though they were—that they met thus but for her sake. It was the work of an instant, yet to the Neapolitan it seemed long as half a life, that struggle in which the lightning swoop of his unseen enemy swept him from his prey, and bore down on him with the might of vengeance, in the silence of the night which he had thought had veiled his tyranny and his crime from all eyes. No living man had ever crossed the will or the passions of the great prelate until now that he was seized as lions seize in the death-grapple.

They were almost perfectly matched; equal in strength as in stature, though in one a life of adventure and hardihood had braced all that in the other a life of effeminate indulgence had enervated. Giulio Villaflor beneath his sacerdotal robes had a warrior's frame and a warrior's soul; many a time, hearing of battle-fields and soldier's perils, he had longed to gird a sword on his loins and go down in the van to the slaughter; and as the gripe of Erceldoune's hand fastened on his throat, and the gleam of his enemy's eyes flashed suddenly into his, the desert rage, the desert courage, roused in the silken soft-footed panther of the Church. In the lamp-lit cell, under the black vaulted roof, in the hush of the midnight-silenced monastery, they wrestled together in that wild-beast conflict, which makes the men who are maddened by it savage and blood-thirsty as the beasts whose ferocity they share.

Such feeble flickering light as there was in the dungeon shone on the majestic figure of the priest, clothed in the dark floating robes of the Church, and the athletic form of his foe, in the white loose linen dress of the Capriote sailors, as breast to breast, face to face, with their lofty limbs twined like gladiators, and their hands at each other's throats, they swayed, and reeled, and rocked to and fro, in that deadly embrace. It was the work of scarce twenty seconds; yet in it they rent and tore at each other as lion

and leopard may do in the yellow dust of a tropic dawn, when long famine has made both ravenous for blood, and each beast knows that he must conquer and kill, or feel the fangs plow down into heart and flanks, and his own life pour out forever. The prelate, who, ere now, had never even known a hand too roughly brush his sacred person, sought only to fling off the grasp that strangled and the arms that crushed him; his foe, rife with revenge and burning with a rival's hate against the spoiler who would have left him nothing of his love save a vain unending agony, could have torn his heart out where they wrestled in as deadly a combat as ever was that with which retiarius and secutor reddened the white sand of Augustan amphitheaters.

A moment, and the hardier strength, the leonine force, of Erceldoune, so often tested in victory under the red foliage of Canadian forests and the scorching suns of African skies, conquered; he crushed the priest in his sinewy arms till the chest-bones bent, and the breath was stifled, as in the gripe of the Arctic bear; then, with one last effort, he swung the Italian off, and raising him by the waist, flung him with all his might downward on to the stone floor, the limbs falling with a dull, crushing, breaking sound as they were dashed against the granite.

Thrown so that his head smote the flags with a shock like iron meeting iron, Villaflor fell insensible, the force with which he was tossed outward stunning his senses, and throwing him a bruised, motionless, huddled mass in the gloom of the dusky cell. The proud and princely ecclesiastic lay powerless, silenced, broken, helpless, like a dead cur, in the heart of the monastery where his word was law, and his will absolute as any sovereign's.

His foe stood above him, his foot on the prostrate throat, that swelled and grew purple with the suffocated breath, the stifled blood. He had lost all memory save the sheer animal impulse to slaughter and avenge; and his heel ground down on to the Neapolitan's neck, treading out life till the rich lips of the Roman gasped in unconscious torture, and the olive tint of his bold smooth brow grew black as the full veins throbbed and started beneath the skin.

One pressure more, and the last pulse of existence would have been crushed out where he lay, with his teeth clinched and his senseless eyes staring upward:—the touch that could lead him where it would, as a child, fell lightly on her avenger's arm. Idalia's voice thrilled him with its sweet brief words:

"Wait! *You* are too brave for that. He is fallen; let him lie."

Her gaze dwelt on him, full, humid, eloquent, speaking her gratitude far more deeply than by words. Breathless, victorious, with the war-lust in his eyes, and his heart panting under the bruised muscles and the aching sinews of the chest to which his enemy had been strained in so deadly an embrace, Erceldoune turned and looked at the woman for whose sake he had fought, as a hound, called off from the throat of the thief he has pulled down, looks at the master he obeys, even while he longs to serve him, and revenge him, with the death-gripe.

He took his heel off the neck of Giulio Villaflor.

"As you will."

His voice shook over the simple words; his face flushed hotly to the very temples as, for the first time, he met her gaze; his eyes searched hers, thirstily wistful, wildly eager.

"Come, for the love of God! You trust me?"

"As I never trusted any."

She stretched out to him, as she spoke, her fettered hands that, even chained, had found strength in them to hold the slender blade that would have sheathed itself in her heart or her tyrant's. There was that in the action which, even in such a moment, made him feel faint and blind with hope. It repaid him all—would have repaid him his death-stroke, had he laid dying at her feet.

For all answer he crushed the steel links that hung, holding her wrists powerless, in the grasp which had stifled Giulio Villaflor, and bent and wrenched and twisted them with the same force as that by which he had once torn off an Indian boar from its writhing human prey; the chain broke and fell asunder.

His eyes, as they looked up to hers, spoke a meaning to

which her own heart answered as flame leaps to the touch of a torch.

"We will have *one* freedom—the freedom of death, if not of life!"

She knew all that the whisper meant; knew that he might be powerless to give her the liberty of existence, but that he would give her the liberty of the grave—and share it.

As the links of her fetters broke, a rush, an alarm, a tumult, were borne down the silence from the distant corridors; the monks had awakened, and found either their stranger-guest absent or their bolted gates unloosed. Those doors once freshly closed, those sleepers once aroused from their countless cells, and every avenue of escape would be sealed, every chance of flight ended forever.

Without a pause for breath, without a glance at the fallen form of the great churchman, without sense or memory of the aching sinews and the bruised nerves that throbbed in heavy pain across his own breast, where the strength of his foe had dealt him blows that had rained down like an iron hammer on an iron plate, he drew his pistol with one hand, while with the other he held her close against him.

"We will beat them yet!" he said, in his teeth, that were clinched like the strong fangs of a mastiff; there was the glow of fiery passion on his face, and his heart, as his arm touched her, beat as it had never beaten even in the close-locked struggle with the man who had sought to deal her dishonor. He was a soldier at the core; all a soldier's daring, all a soldier's war-fire, rose in him, as with him alone lay her defense, her liberty, her life.

With the swiftness of a moorland deer he plunged out into the gloom of the passage beyond, and dashed down the windings of the narrow vaulted ways. The darkness was like the depth of midnight, and the first false step might fling them like broken birds upon the stone of the wall that towered on either side, or down the sheer descent of the granite stairs that ever and again at intervals led into the unknown horrors of the underground crypt and vaults. Yet, as he bore her onward through the rayless, treacherous blackness, a sweet, fierce joy was on him: for her pleasures, and her riches, and her brilliance, half the

world might be her comrades and her candidates, but he alone shared her danger. In her prosperity so many had been round her; in her extremity he had no rival.

The rush of feet, the clamor of voices, the tremulous utterance of vague alarm pierced shrilly and incessantly from the farther end of the building the dead silence of the night. From the broken cries which reached him, he could tell that the priests knew nothing as yet of the fall of their great leader, but had been awakened by the noise of the far-off conflict, and had discovered his absence and the Umbrian's drunken sleep. But one chance remained—the single chance of reaching the entrance-hall before they searched there for him.

"Can you fire?" he whispered, as he bore her onward and outward to where the feeble lamp-light gleamed yellow and faint in the passages he had traversed.

In answer, her hand glided over the barrel of his weapon, and closed on the butt firmly.

"My life has hung on my own shot before now."

There was no tremor in her own tones as she replied to him; there was only the calm valor that thrilled him as a clarion thrills the soldier who hears its silvery melody command him to face death and to deal it.

"Promise me one thing?" she murmured.

There was light enough now, gray and dusky as it was, for him to see her eyes as they looked up to his, the gold gleam of her hair against his breast, the glisten of the steel blade against her bosom.

"All things."

"Then, if we are outnumbered, keep the last shot for me, and *take sure aim.*"

A mortal anguish quivered through him; he knew it might well prove that this boon, and this only, would be all that he could do to rescue or obey her.

"The last but one," he answered. "The last shall bring me to you."

The words were brief, and had the noble simplicity of his own nature in them, blent with a high devotion that held her honor dearer yet than all her beauty, and would obey her will even unto this last thing of death. He had loved her ere now as dogs love. as slaves love, as men

love whose passions can make them madmen, dotards, fools; but with that hour he loved her more grandly, more deeply, with a passion that sank into her heart, and stirred it as the storm winds stir the sea; that, for the first time in all the years in which this insanity had been roused by her and lavished on her, moved her to reverence what she ruled, to feel the strength, the depth, the force of this life that she, and she alone, could break as a child breaks reeds. She was silent; she let herself be borne by him through the twilight; she, too, felt a lulling sweetness, a subtle charm, in that breathless passage through the gloom, whose only goal might be the grave. She, too, felt something of that dreamy sorcery which lies in the one word—"together."

Nearing them came the clamor of the shrill Italian voices; behind them, from the cell where Giulio Villaflor was stretched senseless, the shouts of those who found their lord lie dying as they deemed, rang the alarm through the whole monastery, till the stones echoed with the outcry. From the stillness of slumber and the drowsy monotone of prayer, the whole silence teemed with noise and tumult; the whole building was alive with men, who started from their first stupor of sleep in vague terror and senseless excitation, while above all thundered the roll of the hound's bay, attacked at his post and giving challenge to his menacers.

"If he can guard the gates, you are free!"

The cry broke from Erceldoune with the agony of a prayer as he pressed on into the great hall, where the single swinging entrance lamp burned dully through night and day. Hope almost died in him as he saw the crowd of monks that filled it, while before the unbarred door the dog couched like a lion ready to spring, with his mane erect, and his eyeballs red with fire, and his mighty teeth gleaming white under his black-bearded muzzle, holding them so at bay that none dared be the first to pass him and swing to afresh the unloosed bolts and chains. They forgot the hound as they saw the prisoner of their Church, and rushed on to her with a shrill yell. There were men among them who had flung the priestly robes over lives of foul crimes and unsuccessful villainies; and men who had hated her for that mere feminine forbidden loveliness that

here, in their stone-locked den, they never looked on; and men who would have killed her, were it only that such service might find them fair favor in the eyes of the great dignitary, who held their fates in the hollow of his hand. These turned from the dog, and threw themselves headlong toward Erceldoune as he came out of the darkness of the corridor into the entrance square, low-roofed and broad, with the arch of the door filling its farther end.

He paused, and leveled his pistol full in the eyes of the foremost.

"Let me pass, or you are dead men."

The flash of the steel tube in their sight, the pressure of its cold circle on the forehead of the nearest, staggered them a moment; they recoiled slightly one on another. They had measured the height and the girth of this stranger's limbs as they had sat with him at their meal, and they dreaded the tempest of his wrath. He, holding her to him still with one arm, and covering the foremost with his aim, thrust himself against the mass of the monks—half-clothed as they started from their first heavy slumbers—and strove to pierce his way through them to the gates. A voice from behind cut the silence like a bullet's hiss.

"Cowards! Bolt the doors and trap them; we can pinion them then at our leisure!"

The speaker, as his figure towered in the shadow, was a gaunt Abruzzian giant, fierce-eyed, hollow-cheeked, eager and lustful for slaughter; in a long dead time he had been a chief among ferocious soldiery, who had brued his hands deep in blood, and the old savage instincts flared alight, and the old brute greeds breathed free again, as for once after long captivity they broke the bondage of the priesthood. He took the leadership among the herd of half-awakened and bewildered monks, as the long-stifled impulses of war and murder rose in him, and glared wolf-like from his eyes, reddened with a light that was well-nigh insanity. The Abruzzian lived once more in a thousand dead days of battle, of rapine, and of cruelty, as he strode downward into the hall, heaving aloft a great iron bar with which he had armed himself, in default of other weapon.

Erceldoune, as he turned his head, and saw the lamp light glow on the lean ravenous face, knew that here lay

his worst foe; the rest might be driven like a flock of sheep if once terror fairly mastered them, but in this man he read the bloodthirst of the tiger, the fiercer and the more ruthless for its long repression. With the keen glance of a soldier, the warrior-monk sprang forward to secure the doorway; once netted, he knew that the prisoners could be dealt with at pleasure. The weight of the iron bar was lifted, to be hurled on to the hound's head, where Sulla was planted at his guard, and—no more to be moved in fear or in wrath than the sentinel, who perishes at his post for sake of honor and obedience—might be slain so with ease, though not passed or approached except at cost of life. The iron swung above the Abruzzian's head, swaying lightly as a flail, to descend with another instant on to the dog's bold brow; as it was raised, his arm fell paralyzed, Erceldoune's first shot broke the bone above the wrist. Maddened with the pain, the monk shifted the bar to his left hand, and, forgetful of the hound, rushed on to his antagonist, head downward, with the blind infuriated onslaught of a wounded boar. Erceldoune, watching him with quick, unerring surety, was ready for the shock, and, sparing his fire—for he knew not how much more yet he might need it—caught him with a blow on the temple as he rushed on, which sent him staggering down like a felled ox. As he dropped, his brethren, catching that contagion of conflict which few men, priests or laymen, can resist when once launched into it, threw themselves forward to revenge his fall, rough-armed with the hatchets, the clubs, the pickaxes, used in out-door toil, which hung or leaned against the wall.

Brigands of Calabria, tigers of the Deccan, would not have been wilder in their rage than these sons of peace, whose passions were for the first time loosened from control, and took in one brief hour payment for all that had been silenced, and iced, and fettered under the weight of the Church's rule. The sight of a woman's loveliness lashed like a scourge the bitter, longing, futile envy roused beforehand in them by the stranger who had broken their bread, and showed them all that they had lost in losing forever their freedom of will and act. The eyes of Idalia, as they flashed over them, stung to fever heat the vain regret, the hate of their own bonds, the acrid jealousy of

all liberty lost to them and still sweet in others' lives, which had woke in them with the first ring of their guest's firm footfall and fearless tones. What was at riot in them was not a jailer's rage or a hireling's terror of chastisement; it was their own heart-sickness, their own years of passionate pain, their own rebellion, and their own despair, which made them savage as murderers.

For the only time in all his life a deadly fear came on Erceldoune—fear for her. He glanced down once on her, and her eyes gave him back a smile proud, serene, resolute, sweet beyond all tenderness—a smile that said, as though her lips spoke it, "Remember!" It nerved him afresh, as though the courage of Arthur, the power of Samson, poured by it into his veins and limbs. He had sworn to give her the freedom of death, if that of life were beyond his reach; the memory of his promise made him mad with that desperate strength whereby men in their agony reach that which, told or heard in the coolness of calm reason, seems a dream of impossibilities, wild as those of the deeds of the Red Cross.

"Fire with me!" he said in his teeth. "Our lives hang on it."

She heard, and raised her weapon steadily as the priests rushed at them, while the great gaunt body of the Abruzzian lay like a mass of timber at their feet; the two shots echoed together, aimed at the mass of stretching hands, of brawny arms, of gleaming hatchets, of lifted clubs, that was within a hand's breadth of them in the twilight of the lamplit hall. The mass wavered, quivered, staggered back; in that one breathless pause Erceldoune, with his arms round her so that she was held close against his breast, dashed forward with a rush as a lion will dash through the *cordon* of hunters who have fenced him in for the slaughter, hurling them back and front, left and right, by the impetus that bore him through them as swiftly, as resistlessly, as a scythe clears its way through the grasses.

One monk, more rapid than the rest, swerved aside from that terrific charge which carried all before it like the sweep of cavalry, and threw himself against the door to swing the oak close ere the fugitives could reach it. "Seize him!" shouted Erceldoune. The hound had waited, pant-

ing and agonized, for the command; he sprang on the monk's breast, and threw him prostrate, his fangs clinched in the man's throat almost ere the words that loosed him from his guard were fairly uttered. The fair, still, lustrous night gleamed soft and starlit through the narrow space of the opened portals; the world and all its liberty lay beyond. Blows were rained on him, yells hooted in his ear, hands clutched his clothes, his limbs, his sash, to wrench him back; an axe hurled at him struck him, burying its blade an inch deep in his shoulder; a herd of devils shrieked, cursed, wrestled, and pursued behind him. He heeded nothing, felt nothing, heard nothing; he only guarded her from the weapons that were flung in his rear, so that none should touch her save such as struck first at him, and bore her like the wind through the half-opened door out into the night-air and down the flight of rock-hewn stairs; the hound coursing before him down the slope of the black rugged precipitous steps, slippery with moss, and worn uneven by the treading steps of many centuries. One step unsure, and they would be hurled head downward on to the stones below; there was no moonlight on the depth of intense shadow that shelved straight into fathomless darkness; behind, the rush of the priests followed, and the clamor of their shouts shook the night silence; yet on he went, fearless, reckless, impervious to pain, and feeling drunk, with the sweet freedom of the fresh night wind, with the beating of her heart upon his own. To have held her thus one instant, he would have given his life up the next.

Of that downward passage he had no knowledge, no memory in after-time; he followed it as men in a night-mare follow some hideous path that ends in chaos; he touched the earth at last, clearing the three last granite rungs of the rock ladder with a leap that landed him in the moonlighted breadth of turf that stretched beneath. He rushed across it at the speed of a wild deer, making straight for the cypress knot where he had bidden the horses be waiting. A monk held him close in chase—so close that the priest reached the ground well-nigh with him. He did not see or dream his danger; Sulla did, and, with one mighty bound, was on the Italian's naked chest, rending, and tearing, and crushing him as he had dealt with wolf and

with bear in his own woods. The monk fell well-nigh senseless, and the dog tore onward through the moonlight with a loud bay of joy, of challenge, and of freedom.

They were alone; the pursuit could not reach them for seconds at least—seconds, precious in that extremity as years. The clamor and tumult of the monastery pealed from the height above; but few of the brethren would dare to risk the peril of descent in the blackness of midnight, the few that would must be some moments yet before they could be on him. In the shadow of the cypresses stood the horses, held by a German lad, and eased by rest till they were fresh as though they had not left their stalls.

Without words, she threw herself in the saddle; she had ridden stirrupless ere then across the brown, dark desolation of the Campagna, in an autumn night, with the Papal troops out against her. In all her sovereignty, he had never seen her beautiful as she was now in the white flood of starlight that fell through the cypress-boughs. Idalia was of that nature to which danger is as strong wine. Her face was pale to the lips, but resolute as any soldier's on the eve of victory; her hair shaken down rested in great masses that gleamed golden in the flickering light, her right hand still held the pistol as though it were some love-gage that she treasured close, and the fairness of her face was set calm as death, resolute as steel, even while her eyes burned, and glowed, and dilated with the ardent fire of war, and with a look sweeter than that which swept over him like a sorcery.

"Off!" she said, low and eagerly. "Every second is life!"

While she spoke he was in the saddle; the horses, young and wild, broke away at a touch in a stretching gallop, with the brave hound coursing beside them mad with the joy of his liberty. The hoofs were noiseless on the moss that was damp and yielding by the moisture from the swamps, and the belt of the cypress screened their flight from the monastery; the monks would search for hours till their torches flared out, in every nook and cleft of the rocks around, ere ever they would dream that that midnight ride had borne away their prisoner.

Out of the cypress grove and beyond the beetling wall

of the crags the moonlight lay in a broad white sheet, clear and soft as dawn, across the open country; mirrored in the surface of the still lagoons, and scarcely broken by a tree or hut. Afar the still green fields of rye and maize were scarce stirred by a breath, and the twisted boughs of the olives, with their gray silver foliage, were veiled with a soft mist, the steam of the marshes and the plains. Through the sweet, luminous, half light, while the water-threaded earth trembled beneath them, and the rank grasses were crushed under their fleet hoofs, they rode as those alone ride behind whom pursues Death, and before whom lies Freedom.

Through the shallow pools, with the water splashed to their girths, and circling away in eddying rings as they broke its slumbering quiet; through the vaporous haze that hung over the black expanse of the morass and the plain till they seemed to hunt down the white wraiths of its smoke that curled and uncurled before them; through the tall, reedy grasses that broke as they crushed them, and sent a fresh, dreamy odor out on the air as they bowed their broad ribbons and their feathery clusters; through the deep, intense silence, till the water-hen flew with a scream from her rest, and the downy owl brushed by with a startled rush, and the landrail woke with his shrill cry from his sleep in the midst of the millet-stalks; through the balmy southern night they rode as those can only ride behind whom yawn a prison and a grave, before whom smile the world and all its liberty

CHAPTER XXV.

"STOOP DOWN AND SEEM TO KISS ME ERE I DIE."

ALL through the night they rode on, till the slender arc of the young moon was sinking toward the west, and all the countless stars were shining larger and clearer toward the dawn, burning through the blue-black darkness of the sky, veiled ever and again by sweeping trails of mist.

Under the gray dim colossal arches of the Ferratino gates fresh horses waited; the tired beasts were changed in haste and without question, and the young unworn ones raced on through the gloom as fleetly as wild horses sweep over prairie plains. Behind them hunted Death; with the morning light the whole land would be as one host risen against them, as one snare spread to trap them; the blood-hounds of a Church were on their track, and the hate of a king and a priest ran them down; yet scarce a touch of fear, scarce a breath of the chillness of terror were on them; they had drunk deep of the rich hot wine of danger, and one at least was blind with the blindness of passion.

The world was still about them; all things slept. The earth was hushed and without sound, as though the deep tranquillity of death had fallen everywhere. Only through the calmness came the low sigh of the air through the grasses, and the liquid murmur of unseen waters foaming down from height to height, or stealing under the broad leafage of arum-shadowed channels. Nothing awakened around them, save the downy-winged aziola, or the change-ful bands of the fireflies gleaming like gold among the gray plumes of olives, or above the tender green seas of ripen-ing millet. The summer was still young, and the night was divine, as the nights of the south alone are; the barren plains and the vaporous pools were passed with the swift-ness of a dream, and beyond the olive belts and the outer woods of cypress lay the richness and riot of Italy, all

shadowed and softened, and steeped in the moonbeams. Vineyards where the budding grapes were thrusting their first life through the leaves; great chestnut woods, where no ray pierced the massive fans of foliage, and the ground was white as though from snow with the heavy fall of the dropped flowers; fields where melon and gourd, and the fantastic shapes of the wild fig-tree coiled one in another, fragrant as gods' nectar, when the hoofs trod out the fruit and bruised the amber skins, and broke through the filmy, silvery webs of weaving insects, all glittering with the dew; black, silent groves, noiseless and cavernous, with the hollow moan of earth-imprisoned torrents, and lofty aisles of cedars shutting in the broken ivy-covered ruins of the deserted altars of dead gods; vast piles of rocks, and dim, soft stretching plains and hills covered with ancient strongholds mouldering to dust, and sweet nestling dells where sheeted water mirrored in the starlight the slender stems of sea-pines and the marble shafts of classic temples. Through them they rode, never drawing rein, with the hound coursing beside them, through the changeful light of the calm late hours, guiding their flight by the stars, and holding ever straight for the sea. With sunrise the soldiers of the king, the mercenaries of Church and of State, would be out over the land; the night alone was liberty. Liberty, for the breath of the wind on their brows, for the splash of river-spray on their lips, for the wild joy of fearless speed, for the fragrance of trampled flowers, for the limitless glory of sight free to range over the width of the earth, for the nameless rapture of living when every sense and pulse of life is hot as with wine, yet is lulled as with sleep, and holds the pain of the world well endured for the sake of one hour of joy. Liberty, in whose sweetness lies all the ecstasy of life, and in whose loss lies all its anguish.

Through the shallow foam of half-dry water-courses, through the long sear grasses where the cattle couched, through the odorous thickets of wild myrtle, through the withes of osiers where the bittern, wakened, rose with his sullen booming cry, they rode on toward the sea. Down the perilous slopes of ravines, where the loosened shingles shook in showers into yawning depths; down naked breadths of stone where no mosses broke the polished in-

cline, and one uncertain step was death; across bridges high in air, spanning the white smoke of boiling torrents, while the timbers shook and bent beneath them; under mighty aisles of oak and cypress, where no path led save such as the rush of their gallop forced between the breaking boughs, they held their way by the light of the planets, through the twilight haze that deepened to blackest gloom where the woods closed above, and lightened to silvery luster where the plains stretched out unbroken. All memory of danger, all sense of danger had fallen from them; on her the dreamy night silence and the passionate sweetness of freedom rested; with him there was no thought remaining save that he alone held his place by her bridle-rein, that he alone had delivered her out of her bondage.

In the vast calm around them all was at rest save their own hearts, save their own flight that held on for the same goal; all human life except their own seemed banished from the world, and the slumber-hushed earth left only to them; through ravine and woodland, through vineyard and valley, under the overhanging brow of lonely cliffs, and across the swaying bridge of giddy heights they rode together; and while the flickering light flashed down through parted leaves upon her beauty, and ever and again as he swept on beside her he met the gleam of her eyes through the shadows, he who loved her felt drunk with his joy. What cared he though he should fall dead at her feet when that midnight ride should have reached its end? He should have passed to his grave with her.

Where the jagged iron had been hurled against him, the rent nerves throbbed, and the linen was stained with blood; where his rival had strained him in that deadly embrace, the breadth of his chest was bruised as though weightily struck by a mace, and compressed as though tight-bound in bands of steel; but he felt none of its pain, he knew none of its suffering, he only knew that she rode beside him, that through him she was saved, that once his arms had held her, that still in all the width of the world there was none with her in her extremity save himself,—whose love she had forbidden, yet whose love, she had seen, outlasted all, and only asked of her a place with her in her danger, a place near her in her death.

No words passed between them; the breathless passage of their flight left no space for speech, and the soft hush of the darkened world was too solemn to be broken. There was no sound, except the throbbing of the hoofs' beat scouring fast as the wind the seaward way to the shore. They had broken away from the beaten track, lest any should see and mark their course, and had borne straight across the country westward to where the bay lay—breaking through the blossomed vines, the sheets of maize, the nets outspread for birds in southern mode, the deep-grown screens of myrtles fencing villa lands, and the wild growth of rocky channels, where hidden streams ran below earth, and made the vegetation riot rank and thick, where the snake found its lair, and the mosquito swarmed in hundreds, and the hot heavy vapor uprose like clouds of steam. Now and then her eyes turned on him in the darkness of cypress shadows, or where some yawning river-bed, yellow and reed-choked, and unfathomed in the gloom, was crossed with a measureless leap, their horses close abreast. For all else, except the echo of the ringing hoofs trampling through ripening corn, or sounding loud on rocky pathways, there was utter silence between them as they swept onward to the sea, as swiftly and as surely, by unreasoned instinct, as hunted deer make for it, when before them lie the waves and behind them the hounds hold chase.

The night was fast waning, the stars growing larger, till the whole skies seemed on fire with their brilliance; the hours were passing swiftly—the hours which alone were safety. Here and there, from lonely marshes, the bittern's booming call sounded, desolate and mournful; or, as the trodden millet-stalks muffled the noise of their gallop, the cry of the cicada could be heard from under the maize. The world went by them vague as a dream, mist-like as a cloud; ruined temples, shadowy landscapes, waters glistening white, monastic piles darkly looming down from rocky heights, sullen depths malarious impenetrable death-laden, divine beauty gleaming vine-crowned under southern moonbeams, all passed by them like the fleeting, changeful phantoms of a feverish sleep. They rode on and on, without thought, without refuge, with one impulse only, to leave league on league between them and the abhorrent dens of

the Church; the burning breath of the past agony was on them, driving them forward as the curling prairie flames drive the lives they course after; and the riot of liberty was in them both, with every breath of wind that tossed the foliage from their path, with every current of air that drove sweet, and wild, and warm against their faces, as they dashed down by the pole-star's guide straight to the sea, yet northward first, ere they bent round to the shore, since Naples, where she lay amid her loveliness, was the tiger's lair of priest and king, was death and worse than death.

The horses coursed like greyhounds; their feet scarcely touched the earth; the shallow brooks, the parched soil, the reddening osiers were scattered as they went; neck and neck, their heads stretched like racers, their flanks heaving, their bits foam-covered, they held on at that mad pace, without pause, without stint, now forced through screens of netted boughs, while the great chestnut fans blinded their eyes, and the branches snapped with a crash, and the vipers slid from under their feet—now scouring swamps where the earth quaked beneath them, and the heron's wings, startling, brushed them, as the brooding birds rose with a rush—now keeping footing, as best they could, down narrow ledges of slippery rock, where the mosses glided and the stone crumbled under the crush of their thundering gallop. Mile on mile, league on league, were covered with that breathless racing speed, that reckless course on giddy heights, that headlong plunge through tawny waters; when any risk, darker than the rest, was in their way, his hand closed on her bridle-rein, so that the peril which might menace her should by no chance swerve by from him; and, in these moments, her eyes met his, and dwelt on him with a look that made him blind with the sickness of hope. She was his in these hours at least—his in her need, in her solitude, in her jeopardy, in her flight; his now, for this one night, so far as bonds of mutual danger could so render her, so far as his arm alone to shield her, his heart alone to beat for her, his strength alone to stand between her and her foes, could lend him right to hold her so; his, while the net and the withes were about her, and the sleuth-hounds were tracking her down, even though—if she ever again reached her freedom and her

sovereignty once more—she should forget that he once had served her thus, and bid him go and see her face no more. He loved her with an exceeding love; not less would he have brought her from her misery, or less have laid down his life to save hers, though he had known that dying thus he should never have seen even one look that thanked him.

Passion was stronger than pain, and gave him unconsciousness of it, as it had given him the thews and the sinews of giants in the contest whereby he had freed her; though the monk's blows had been rained on him like a smith's blows on his anvil, and his breast had been bruised, and dinted, and swollen by the grip of his priestly foe when they had strained and stifled each other like wrestlers in the death-fling, he had no feeling of suffering, no feeling of exhaustion. The reckless glow of triumph was on him; the fragrance of the sultry night seemed to steep his senses in voluptuous delight; the fierceness of contest and slaughter were still hot in his veins, and the lulling charm of a dream fell upon him while the world lay sleeping in silence and darkness, and to his hand alone was delivered the defense of Idalia's liberty. He would have reeled out of his saddle before he would have been conscious that illness was on him; to have force still to ride on thus, he would have pressed into his side a dagger that had dealt him his death-wound, though he had known that, to purchase life so for an hour, was to lose life forever when the hour should be passed.

At every leap their hunters rose to, the wound that the iron had slashed quivered and opened as though the rusted axe afresh was hurled at it; at every convulsive bound with which the beasts cleared some riven chasm of stone or some high aloe fence that lifted its sharp foliage right in their course, the weight on his chest caught his breath, and the bruised muscles ached to bursting; often the stars grew giddy above him, and the *lucciole* glittering among the leaves looked a confused heap of sparkling fire, till he could scarce tell which was earth beneath and which was sky above him; often faintness came over him from the loss of the blood that had soaked his fishing-shirt through, and the weight of the blows dealt upon him which at the time of contest he had felt no more than he felt now the

gentle rain of the syringa flowers as they were showered from the boughs they broke asunder. Yet he had barely any knowledge of this; he flung it off him, and was strong as he rode—strong to watch every danger that threatened her in their passage—strong to lead their flight with a mountaineer's keenness of vision, a desert-hunter's instinct of guidance—strong to let her see no paleness on his face save the pallor of moonlight, no look in his eyes save the love that had dared all things for her, and would do so unflinchingly on to the end, whatsoever that end might still be. A wild, senseless, fiery intoxication of joy was upon him; he knew no pain, he knew no weakness—he fled with her alone through the sweet southern night. Come what future there would, no fate could wash this out, no fate could steal this from him;—that once his arm had thrust dishonor and death back from her, that once his heart alone had been her shield against her foes.

The first gray gleam of dawn was breaking where the morning star hung in the deep mystical blue of night, when their horses, panting, worn, steaming, covered with foam, and staggering in their gallop, tore down through forest glades of oak and bark into the heart of woods where once the altars of Dionysius had arisen, and the print upon the thyme where the wild goat had wandered had been kissed by shepherds' lips as sacred ground touched by the hallowing hoof of Pan. The wood stretched up a hillside's slope dark even by day, so thickly woven were the old gnarled boughs, so heavy was the foliage even in summer drought, from the hidden streams that ran beneath its soil, sunsheltered and making cool liquid music through the gloom, rising none knew whence, flowing none knew whither, but telling to all who chose to hear of the dead days when their song had mingled with the vine-feast chants to Bacchus, and had borne their cadence in companionship with the thoughts of Virgil or of Martial. No heat could reach, no season parch, those subterranean waters that here and there broke up to sight, rushing brown and bright under the moon, but soon were lost again in the recesses of the earth, and only traced by the rich herbage that grew whereever they wound, or—when the stillness was hushed into a silence intense as Alpine solitudes—by the murmuring

hollow ripple that told where they threaded their way through secret channels to the sea. Here the sun-rays could not touch to burn the grasses black; here the twisted leafage was fresh and dew-laden as though a northern coolness fanned them; here the silvery arum uncurled above the screened channels of the brooks; here the white hellebore thrust its delicate head through mosses green and curling as though they grew under English elm-woods.

And here in the deep loneliness, sunk over their hocks in the water-fed reeds and grasses, the worn-out horses slackened speed and strained to reach a freshet that brimmed and bubbled under an aisle of oaks; and as the headlong gallop paused, and the swift rush of the air ceased, as they entered those dim aisles that had the twilight gloom and calm of some mighty temple to forgotten gods, a sudden blindness veiled all things—even her face—from his sight, Erceldoune swayed heavily forward on his saddle, the faintness of mortal pain vanquished him at last.

With sheer instinct he threw himself from his stirrups and staggered toward her; all was dark and sickly to his senses, and the iron bands seemed to crush tighter and harder round his chest, straining out the very life; but his thought was still for her, and he smiled in her eyes, though he could no longer see but only felt that they were on him.

"Have no fear;—it is nothing!"

But even as the words left his lips his strength at length was conquered; and senseless from the loss of blood, he reeled slightly, and fell, head backward, on the earth.

Almost ere he had fallen Idalia was beside him; she had not dreamed that he was wounded or even in suffering, till with those few gentle words he had staggered and swayed downward like a dying man. Then, where the moonlight strayed in through a parting in the branches above, she saw that his face was white as the arum lilies among which he fell, and that the snowy crowns of the flowers and their broad and pointed leaves were darkened with the stain of blood, soaking through the linen of his barcarolo's dress. He was stretched there as when first she had found him under the Carpathian pine-woods, where he lay struck down by the bullets of his Greek assassin, with the vultures waiting above to swoop to their feast. For many moments she

knelt by him, in the set mute apathy of anguish; no tears rose before her sight, and her proud lips were pressed close without a sound, almost without a breath, but as she gazed an agony came in her eyes greater than any that the uplifted scourge or the locked fetters of her prison had wrung from her.

"O God!—not his life, too!"

The prayer broke stifled and heartbroken from her very soul; she had seen so many perish for her, perish through her; she had seen the brave lives at Antina fall like the ears of wheat, ripe to the reaping; she had known that east and west, far and near, in the wide wastes of the Magyarland as in the silent streets of Venice, in the snow plains of the Muscovite empire as in the laughing loveliness of Lombard meadows, men had poured out their blood like water at her bidding, under her will, only for sake of that fatal beauty which many with their last wrath in the battle-field or on the scaffold had cursed with bitter reproach, which some—and not so few—had to the last still blessed. So many had died for her!—and now he who had found at her hands but coldness and suffering, and gone without reward for a loyalty passing all that even she had ever found, lay to all seeming dead or dying at her feet; as a noble hound dies for its mistress's sake, dies faithful to the last, though never may her hand have given him one caress, though never may her lips have spoken more than careless command or chill dismissal.

She knew then that she loved him; loved him not with pity, nor with disdain for love as weakness, nor with mere warmth to one who had risked all things in her cause, but loved him with a passion answering his own, with a passion holding the world worthless if he no more were numbered with the living. To-night, when his heart had throbbed against hers; to-night, when his strength had stood between her and her destroyer; to-night, when his promise had been given her to save her with death, if no other freedom were left him wherewith to rescue her; to-night, she had known that she had loved him with the love she had deemed dead in her heart, impossible to her nature; she, with whom love had been but the scepter with which to sway slaves, the mandragora with which to blind madmen,

the supreme folly with which women, otherwise powerless, reach a power that mocks at kings and creeds, and reign over the broadest empire of earth.

She knelt by him, mute, motionless, with a terrible longing in the haughty eyes that had never quailed under Giulio Villaflor's and had made the Umbrian priest let fall the lash. In that moment—in the silence and the loneliness of the forest, where the shadows closed above them, and in all the width of the land there was not one whom she could summon to his aid, one whom she dared trust with their lives—the anguish she had oftentimes too mercilessly dealt, too lightly counted, recoiled back on her. She learned what it could be to bear this thing that men call love, this deadly gambling of heart, and thought, and sense which casts all stakes in fate upon the venture of another's life; she, who had watched that madness so often and so long, with calm, contemptuous gaze, and tempted youth, and manhood, and age into it with a sorcerer's smile, heeding the wreck she made no more than Circe heeded those who went down beneath the waves because her white arms waved them to that fatal sea. She loved him now with a great love; passionate, with the fire that slept in her, yet pure so far as remorse could burn it pure, and harrowed deep with a contrition that would have purchased freedom, and peace, and joy for him had it been possible, at any cost, at every sacrifice.

The stillness was intense; the solitude absolute as in a desert, no living thing was near, and had a peopled city been around in place of that profound impenetrable desolation, none could have been summoned to them; she had become as one plague stricken, she was hunted down by Church and King, she could not ask a draught of water from a peasant, or bid his help to bear her lover under a shealing's shelter; the very reeds and grasses trodden in their flight might tell their course and betray their resting-place, the very moments might be numbered in which she could even watch beside him here unpursued, unarrested. Though he perished before her sight, she could not reach for him even the succor of a beggar's wallet, or a charcoal-burner's roof.

The linen of the fishing-shirt had fallen open on his

breast, and by the flickering light shed downward through the leaves she saw where the blows had fallen fast as hail upon his chest, that was strong as any corslet of steel, but blackened and beaten by them like the steel after a long close battle; his head had sunk back, he had reeled down senseless from exhaustion; through the crushed arums the slender stream of the blood still flowed till the snowy cups were filled with it as though they were purpled by wine; she had looked many a time on death, and death seemed to her on his face now as it had done when beneath the mountain pines she had first seen the carrion-birds waiting and hovering above his sightless eyes.

For the moment she had no strength, no consciousness to seek to save him; she knelt beside him, knowing nothing save that through her he too must be sacrificed, that for her this life also had been laid down, uncounting its own loss, yielding up its breath without reproach, forced nobly on to perish in her defense as the bold fealty of a dog forces itself to share the blow aimed at its lord, and falls by it, content if so its lord be saved. She stooped over him, with that look in her eyes with which she had gazed down on the lifeless frame of Carlo of Viana, only that now, beside remorse there was a grief and a passion deeper yet, even while softer, than remorse alone. That gaze, though he lay senseless under it, seemed to have power upon him still, as when first under the Danubian sea-pines it had been bent on him in the glow and fullness of the noon, never again to be forgotten. His eyes, blind and seeing nothing but the dark swaying motion of the leaves and the stars that burned down through the vault of gloom above, still instinctively looked upward seeking hers. A heavy sigh heaved his breast,—a sigh in which words brokenly rose to his lips and died.

"Leave me. I entreat you—save yourself."

His one thought was still of her; his one instinct still was for her. A quiver shook her from head to foot, as fear, and danger, and the pressure of the poisoned steel against her bosom had had no strength to shake her grand and fearless courage. He was faithful to her thus—to the last—and she had given him no recompense save this—to die for her.

Her head bowed its haughty royalty downward and downward until her brow rested on his breast, and her hands drew his within them against the beating of her heart.

"Oh, truest, noblest!" she murmured, "I know it now. I love you, if love be any worth."

Through the sickening delirium in which his mind was floating, through the darkness that closed on sight and sense, and seemed to him, as to her, the presaging shadows of dissolution, the words reached, the touch thrilled him, with an electric shock, a sweetness of hope so wild, so rich, so breathless, that it called him back to consciousness, as in the priestly legends the touch of the anointing chrism has summoned the soul to earth.

He raised himself slightly with convulsive strength, a living warmth flushed the bloodless weariness of his features, his eyes strained through the dimness that swam before them with eager effort to regain their sight.

"Say it again!" he whispered, with that terrible doubt still in his look of one who fears the joy he touches will vanish mocking him. "Say it once more—once more!"

Through the mist before his vision, through the blackness of the forest shades, through the haze of flickering foliage, and watery moonlight, and stars that seemed to stoop and touch the earth, he saw the divine eyes bending over him grow humid, lustrous, gentle with an infinite gentleness.

"Say that I love you? Yes—I say it now."

The words were low, soft, slowly uttered; proud still, for in them she yielded far, but tender with a tenderness the deeper for that pride which stooped, not without lingering reluctance still, to own itself disarmed. The glory that shone one moment on his face she had never seen save in her youth's earliest dreams of the glory on the faces of the gods; for—let the world lie of her as it would—to none had she ever spoken as she spoke now to him, while her voice was sweet as sorcery and filled with unshed tears that would not gather in her eyes, but were driven back to her heart in bitter, aching grief that mingled with the poignancy of softer thoughts and tenderness unloosed at last.

"Yes—I love you. Know it now—it is a poor reward, and comes too late for both."

Then, at last, the passion of its ecstasy reached him, and he knew that it was truth—truth that rushed through him like the wild potence of some eastern drug, burning, blinding, lulling every sense like opium-mingled wine. He lifted himself from where he lay, he stretched his arms out to her, he strove with futile agonized effort to strain his gaze through the mists of pain, to free his strength from the bonds of exhaustion; and once more it was in vain—once more he fell back, powerless, senseless, yet with his thoughts keeping their hold on their one memory of her, and still with that glow as of light upon his face. His lips moved faintly in words that scarcely stirred the grave-like silence of the deep oak-woods:

"O God! if it be love—not pity—stoop down and kiss me once."

She was silent awhile, looking motionless upon him in the gray, fitful, shadowy haze, that was dusky and darkened by the massive canopy of foliage above; then—with a faint flush rising over the weary fairness of her face—lower and lower she drooped her noble, imperial head, and let the warmth and fragrance of her lips rest in the answer that he prayed for on his own.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"WHY MUST I 'NEATH THE LEAVES OF CORONAL PRESS ANY KISS OF PARDON ON THY BROW?"

THE earliest dawn had broken eastward, where the mountains stretched—the dawn of a southern summer, that almost touches the sunset of the past night—but under the dense shadows of the old woods that had sheltered the mystic rites of Gnostics and echoed with the Latin hymns to Pan, no light wandered. There was only a dim silvery haze, that seemed to float over the whiteness of the tall-

stemmed arum lilies and the foam bells of the water that here and there glimmered under the rank vegetation, where it had broken from its hidden channels up to air and space. Not a sound disturbed the intense stillness; that the night waned and the world wakened, brought no change to the solitudes that men had forgotten, and only the memories of the dead-deserted gods still haunted in the places of their lost temples, whose columns were now the sea-pines' stems, and on whose fallen altars and whose shattered sculptures the lizard made her shelter and the wind-sown grasses seeded and took root. Of the once graceful marble beauty and the incense-steeped stones of sacrifice, nothing remained but moss-grown shapeless fragments, buried beneath a pall of leaves by twice a thousand autumns. Yet the ancient sanctity still rested on the nameless, pathless woods; the breath of an earlier time, of a younger season of the earth, seemed to lie yet upon the untroubled forest ways; the whisper of the unseen waters had a dream-like, unreal cadence; in the deep shade, in the warm fragrance and the heavy gloom, there was a voluptuous yet mournful charm—the world seemed so far, the stars shone so near, there were the sweetness of rest and the oblivion of passion.

When her lips had touched his, life had seemed to return to him; he lay in a trance vague as a rapturous dream. He was powerless to answer her, save by his eyes; he had no consciousness, save the one sense of a joy that in its intensity was half delirium; he had no memory, save that he held himself dying, and felt death glorious, divine, welcome as the richest life that ever poured its golden wine out in the sunlight of youth—felt like the lover who, slaughtered at his mistress's feet and learning by his fall her love, murmured with his latest words,

> It was ordained to be so sweet, and best
> Comes now, beneath thine eyes and on thy breast,
> Still kiss me! Care not for the cowards! Care
> Only to put aside thy beauteous hair
> My blood will hurt.

Stretched there motionless, strengthless, seeing only the gaze of her eyes in the dimness, and feeling the depth of the solitude in which their lives were alone, as in the awful stillness of the desert, he knew not yet whether this was

truth, or whether dying visions mocked him—whether this spiritual stillness round him, this madness of incredulous hope, this breath of whispered words that fanned his hair, this caress that burned one moment on his lips, were not the mere phantoms of vain desires dreaming of the joys denied to them forever. For awhile Idalia let him lie thus, with his head sunk back against her heart, and his eyes alone speaking as they gazed up with their doglike fidelity their unutterable passion: she had no thought now that this was death which had come to him; she knew that he would live as surely as though with that answer to his prayer she had breathed back the certainty of existence upon his lips; and she knelt there silent and immovable, letting the moments drift on, forgetful alike of time, of danger, of flight, and of pursuit; remembering no more than if they had never been, alike the agony that was of the past, and the jeopardy that was still of the future. On the dauntless Greek courage—the courage of Marathon that had revived in her—peril had frail and passing hold: and in the deep bosom of these untracked and classic woodlands all sense of mortal fear seemed lost in their profound peace, their nameless melancholy, their ethereal lulling charm.

At last, as though smitten suddenly with the sharp iron of recollection, she moved from him, rose, and went from the great oak shelter where he lay.

"Love! love! What have *I* to do with love?" she murmured, wearily, bitterly, as she leaned her arms on the broken slab of the old stone altar, and let her head droop downward on them. A flood of memories, a tide of thought rushed on her from the years of her past; on the impulses of a gratitude touched to the core by the fealty and devotion of his defense, she had let words escape her that pride had silenced, and weightier chains fettered for so long, that she would have taken her oath no pity for him would ever shake, no yielding in herself would ever lead her to revoke, the decree of severance from her forever, which she had uttered unfalteringly on the night by the Capri sea. It was done; he knew now that she gave him back some measure at least of that passion wherewith he adored her. She gave him love—she who had held it with so superb a

disdain as the dalliance of fools, or the sensualism of libertines; she who used the whole power of its empire but as a weapon, a mask, a snare, a means scorned in itself for ends nearer her heart and worthier the consecration of her thoughts than she deemed that any single life could ever become to her. For the first time—whatever calumny might say, or vain jealousy upbraid her with—for the first time the softness of this passion had touched her, and its caress been given by her. She had made a slave of its madness many a time, or lashed it into fury when she needed, as the priestesses of ancient Syracuse, tamed or enraged the desert beasts they crowned with flowers only later on to lead them out to sacrifice. That she would ever render it back, that she would ever feel to it other emotion than a half contemptuous compassion, had seemed impossible to her for so long. Moreover, when of late some sense of its tenderness had stolen on her, some echo in her own heart been awakened to the strong vibrations of his, she had known that the bonds which bound her could never be loosened, and she had told herself that she had no title to, no fitness for, a noble and unsullied homage.

Where she leaned now against the ruined altar-stones, remorse, keen as though their love were guilt, weighed on her. He had justly won his right to all of joy, of honor, and of peace, that she could give the liberator and defender of her life; he had been willing to purchase liberty for her at loss of all things to himself; he had merited the tenderness she had yielded to him by chivalrous service which no gratitude rendered could repay: and she knew that, in all likelihood, the sole reward her love would bring to him would be a violent death by shot or steel; she knew that the more truly, the more deeply he was loved by her, the more inevitably would the price of her love be to him a fate as merciless as the blow his Abruzzian foe had dealt at him that night. An exceeding bitterness came on her—a heart-sickness of regret. Why had not he come to her in the early years of her youth? Why had not this passion, since at last it reached her, been wakened in her while yet it would have sufficed to her, while yet it would have had no shadow cast upon it from the past, while yet no self-reproach, no weariness of doubt, no fever of reckless am-

bition, and no darkness of untold bondage, of fettered action, of dead memories, would have stretched between them? The poignancy of that cruel remembrance, "too late," which had passed over her when she had leaned against her prison casement, and seen him look upward in the tawny torrid heat of the monastic marshes, was with her now.

She had told him that he was dear to her, and she knew him to be so; knew that she could go to his side and promise him a love that should be no mockery and no treachery, but a living truth, deep and warm, and rooted fast in honor. She had known many who, in other things, equaled or far surpassed him; she had known every splendor of intellect, every dignity of power, every brilliance of fascination in the men of every country who had been about her in so many changing throngs, but none among them had touched her as the singleness and the self-sacrifice of Erceldoune's devotion touched her, and none had roused in her the mingled pity and reverence which the hopelessness of his passion and the chivalry of his character had roused in her almost from the first moment of their intercourse. There was a bold, free magnificence of manhood; there was a lofty, fearless, superb reading of honor and its bonds; there was a noble simplicity and an antique grandeur in the cast of his nature that had won from her what she had never felt to those among her lovers who had charmed her with an intellect a thousand times more subtle, wooed her with a dominion infinitely more commanding than his could ever have been, even had the fortunes of his race never fallen as they had done, or the pursuits of a statesman's glories ever been possible to the untamed Border blood. When in the gloom of the monastery's corridors, with a hundred human tigers thirsty for slaughter swarming from their dens, she had been guarded by his arms and shielded on his breast, his heart had wakened her own with its quick beating; when in the darkness of the night she had made him pledge his word to serve her by a death-shot if to give her freedom from dishonor otherwise were forbidden him, she had felt to this man, whose eyes answered hers in comprehension of that loathing of captivity, that disdain of the terrors of the grave, what was nearer akin

to reverence than the imperial temper of Idalia had ever yielded to any.

He had so far won his way to her at last; severance would have scarce been more misery to him than to her now, and the proud sorceress of the Silver Ivy would have been content that wealth, and power, and sovereignty, and all the changeful triumphs of her career, should drift from her, so that only his gaze should look ever with that loyal worship into hers, so that only her past could be so pure and cloudless in her own sight and his that no poison-mists should ever rise from it before him, so that only she were free to bid him, without any hidden thing between them, look in her inmost heart and see his empire there unshadowed and unshared.

"He loves me—yes! As no man, I think, loved me yet," she thought. "But he loves me because he believes in me. How long should I reign with him if he knew?—if he knew!"

That was the iron weight on her, which made her whole frame sink with that fettered worn-out fatigue and desolation against the ivy-covered stones in the motionless musing that succeeded to the breathless, fearless intoxication of danger and of flight. It would not have been possible to her to do as many weaker and less truthful natures do—seek shelter in self-evasion, and turn the very nobility and trust of the man who loved her into the withes to bind him, and the band to blind him. It would not have been possible to her to stoop and touch his lips with hers, if on hers there was ever to be for him the shame of falsehood or the disgrace of subterfuge. When once she had answered him with that caress he prayed, when once she had murmured to him, "I love you!" she had acknowledged to herself his right that there should never be one thing in her past or her present screened from him, one truth veiled, one act distorted. And on her silence was bound; either way, withholding all or giving all the records of her past, she saw herself a traitress to her creed of truth and justice—a traitress alike to others and herself.

Lost in thought, and weakened now more than she knew by her captivity, by the scant coarse food and noxious air of her prison-house, and by the wild speed of the length-

ened headlong midnight ride, she sat there in the still deep shadows of the oak glades, with the faint gray hue of the young day serving but to deepen into blacker somberness the colonnades of trees. She had left him on the sudden sting of many memories—memories which made it deadly to her pride to have bent thus to passion and to pity—memories which recalled to her that she had no right to bind in with her own the fate of one who brought to her the loyalty of perfect faith in her nature, the defenselessness of perfect ignorance of her past. She had done him evil enough; she had saved his life once, only to chain it so to hers that its doom must be whatever her own became; for her he had risked liberty, existence, everything save honor, ungrudgingly, and with the lavish largesse of a princely giver, who would have held no gift as any worth, no suffering as any sacrifice; now—at the last—she had surrendered her love to him, and listened to his own. She knew that there were thousands who would tell him that this was the darkest evil of all that, through her, had befallen him. And at her heart ached a burning, endless, futile pain, rather for him than for herself, though for herself there was sharp anguish in the knowledge that she had loved him so well that she had slandered her own fame to give herself to his scorn, and spare him one pang at least if it were possible; yet that the world would tell him all love rendered from her could be but a graceful lie to fool him to his peril, an eloquent simulation to cheat him into misery, a mockery, hollow as it was beguiling, to draw him downward, Circe-like, to his destruction.

Her head was sunk on her hands; her thoughts had drifted far in that vague, unreal musing which comes after long fasting and severe exertion; she was unconscious that he followed her wistfully with his gaze, like a dog, as she left him, and slowly, staggeringly, after awhile, rose, steadying himself by the boles of the oak trunks, and came toward her with the dizziness of his wound still on him, but the ardent glow and the bewildered doubt of feverish joy warm on his face and eager in his glance. She was unconscious, even, that he was near till his hand touched her; then, as she started at the touch, she once again forgot that the world held any other than his life and hers.

Stooping, he looked down into her eyes; a look so longing, so incredulous, so straining with hope and fear, as a man might give into the deep brown depths of fathomless waters in whose light he sees some long-lost priceless jewel gleaming.

"Is it true?"

As his voice quivered on the words he read its truth; doubt was no longer with him in its torture as he gazed down on her face; but with a cry from his very heart, a cry of the sheer agony of joy, he drew her in his arms as he had held her against the onslaught of her foes; he gave back that one caress with breathless kisses on her lips and brow; he forgot danger, and pain, and all things upon earth, save that this woman he worshiped was his in all her splendid grace, in all her sovereign loveliness; the world reeled round him—he felt blind, and drunk, and mad. And Idalia for the instant made him no resistance, but let her beauty lie in the arms that so well had shielded it, and let her head rest upon the breast that had been as a buckler rained on by a thousand blows between her and her enemies.

This trance of sweet forgetfulness, this momentary banishment of every bitter thing, she at least could give him, and he had earned his right to it. For the moment, also, she, too, shared it; she felt nothing but the softness, the silence, the voluptuous abandonment of the emotion so long contemptuously discredited and unswervingly repressed as owning any power to sway or move her heart.

Then slowly, and with her old proud reluctance to yield to so much weakness blent with a deeper and a keener pain, she drew herself gently from him, yet still let her head, that never had bent before the savage lust of Giulio Villaflor's tiger glance or at the uplifted scourge of his ecclesiastics, droop on his hand with a gesture that was little less than humiliation, than remorse.

"Do not thank me for *my* love. The world will tell you it is worthless, and can have no strength save to destroy."

For all answer he sank down at her feet, his arms about her still, his hands on hers, his eyes looking upward to her

own with such a radiance in them as she had never seen in any human gaze.

"Destroy me as you will, so that you love me!"

Mad words;—she had heard many such, yet they had never borne the meaning to her that these bore to her now. A shudder passed over her as she heard, a chillness of icy cold that the burning of his kisses on her hands could not warm. She knew it might well be that nothing save ruin might come to him through her. She stooped toward him, and her lips quivered a little as the answer stole from them.

"Well, many will tell you that no other fate can ever come to you from me."

"Whoever does will find his lie his last word."

"But—if *I* say so?"

He smiled—the same smile which she had seen upon his face when he had first looked up at her under the pines of the Carpathian pass.

"I have answered. Do what you will, since you have blessed me thus."

"Blessed you? God knows!——"

Slow tears welled into her eyes as she saw his own so full of longing lustrous eloquence, where he gazed at her in the faintness of the waking day that left the forest gloom and forest hush around them. His trust was so sweet to her, and yet so bitter; sweet because she knew that her heart gave it the answer it believed and sought, bitter because she knew that her past could never merit it or meet it. She passed her hand softly over his forehead with a gesture that from her had deeper tenderness than far more passionate demonstration from natures more yielding and less proud.

"What you have suffered for me!" she murmured. "What you have done and dared! You merit my whole life's dedication for such love—such service. And—that life is so little worthy you."

The woman who so late had fronted Giulio Villaflor with so superb a resistance, so defiant a disdain; the woman who had laughed at the threats and the prayers of her lovers, as of her foes, with so cold and so careless a contempt; the woman who had been tranquil before death,

pitiless in power, victorious against outrage, and without mercy in fascination, felt abased, heart-stricken, smitten with a weary shame, before the loyal gaze of the man who held her life as the most valued and most stainless gift the world could hold for him. To a nature integrally truthful and integrally noble, however warped by circumstance or error, the deadliest sting, the surest awakener of remorse, will always lie in the perfect faith of another's implicit confidence; steeled to venom, careless of censure, and contemptuous of rebuke, it will bend, contrite and self-accusing, before the fidelity and clearness of one regard that vows a simple and unsullied belief through all and against all.

He doubted that he heard her rightly; to him it seemed that he had no earthly thing or claim by which to win her; and he held his service in her cause no more deserving of her care than he held the wolf-hound's at her feet.

"Worthy of *me?*" he echoed, his voice still faint with exhaustion, but breathless with the incredulous joy that seemed to make tenfold strength flow back into his limbs, tenfold force arm him steel-clad to save her. "Oh, my life, my empress, my wife!—what am I that I should ever share one thought of yours?"

She started slightly; a flush of warmth passed over the paleness of her face; a half smile came on her lips, sad yet doubtful, wondering yet reverent.

"You would make me your wife—still?"

She spoke almost dreamily, with a touch of questioning doubt in her words as in her smile, while at the same time there returned to her something of that negligence of hauteur, something of that royalty of challenge, which were as inherent in her as though she had worn the crowns of empires.

"I would? You ask it? Do you not know that I feel mad with the mere license only to touch your hand with mine? And—what insult do you think that I can mean to dare to offer you?"

"None."

She looked at him full in the eyes, with a tenderness infinitely melancholy, a gaze intense in its calm unspoken thought. The single word spoke better than whole phrases

could have done, alike her knowledge that no insult could have been tendered to herself, and that none would ever have been possible from him.

"Then why, in God's name, such a doubt?"

She smiled slightly, with something of her old delicate irony, her own contemptuous, unsparing cynicism, which never was more unsparing than to herself.

"Why? Well, the answer was not sure, or would not have been, rather, if you were as other men. What do you know of me? Where have you lived, if you have not heard my name coupled with evil? Why should you deem so much scruple needful with a woman whom you found a conspirator in chains—a prisoner, degraded to the mercy of Monsignore Villaflor?"

A great darkness swept over her face as she spoke her persecutor's name, though through the bitterness and mournfulness of all her speech there ran the vein of reckless, careless, satirical disdain, which had grown to be as her second nature in many things, and had so long been used as her surest veil to every deeper unacknowledged feeling.

The wistful uncertain pain which that tone had ever brought into his look was in it now, as he stooped toward her; he felt that he had no comprehension, but he was content—with that magnificent folly which is so noble in its rash unwisdom—that he loved her, and believed in her.

"I know nothing of your life—true. But make it one with mine, and I shall hold it as the divinest gift on earth; and if any dare calumniate it, they will find their reckoning with me. Oh, my love, my mistress, my idol! only give me the title to defend your honor against the whole world!"

The tears stood once more in her eyes as she heard the prayer, to which the tremor in his voice gave a yet deeper pathos—a yet more imploring eagerness. She grew paler still as she heard; her lips quivered, a sigh from her heart's depths ran through her. The more faith he lavished on her, the more sublimely mad the blindness of his chivalry, the more heavily self-rebuke smote her, the farther the iron entered into her soul, and the farther she stood in her own sight from any fitness with this man's noble simplicity of

trust. She bent toward him, leaning her head one moment on his hands, where he stood above her—that bright-haired pride-crowned head, that had borne itself with such imperial courage above the massacre of Antina, above the priestly herd of the monastic hall, lowered with the abasement of a brave and erring nature, struck to the core with self-chastisement, and refusing to accept one shade of worship of which it knew itself unworthy.

"Listen!" she said, softly, while a bitterness, that was to herself not to him, lent a strange thrill and force to the low-murmured words—"listen! I have said I love you—love you as I never thought to love—my noblest, bravest, best! But it is because I do, that I tell you I am unworthy of your generous faith—that I tell you there had better be separation between us now and forever. I will not urge on you to leave me because while with me you share my danger. You are too brave to be insulted with such a plea; but I do say, forget that I have ever confessed you have grown dear to me, abandon every hope that I can bring you any happiness; do as I bade you when last we parted—hate me, scorn me, condemn me, if you will; do anything, save trust your happiness to me! There are many women who can lay bare their hearts to you like an open book, make one of them the holder of your honor, they alone merit it, and I am not among them. Who can know me as I know myself? Believe me, then, when I tell you the greatest cruelty I can do to you is to bestow on you my love."

He heard her silently; but not as he had heard her bid him leave her and condemn her the last night they had stood together above the sea at Capri. He knew now that she loved him; knowing that, he refused to take a decree of divorce between them, even from her lips; he claimed a title that he would never surrender, though through years he should vainly assert his right to it. The strong passion and the stanch patience of his nature were welded together, persistent and invulnerable.

"Let me judge that," he said, simply. "If I preferred misery at your hands, rather than paradise at any other's, I should have the right to make the choice."

"Yes, and I the right to guard you from the fruits of

your own madness. You love me with a love that needs an angel to be worthy of it; and I—I have thought of late, that if those tyrants yonder had knelled me under the worst tortures they could frame, they would have done on me no more than my just due; they would only fittingly have avenged all those who died by shot and steel through me."

"What *is* your life, then?"

His voice sank very low, his face was very colorless, as he leaned over her. Believe even her own witness against her he did not, would not; but he knew that some dark thread ran through her life's golden web—he knew that some deadly remorse underlay the brilliancy of her gifts and of her sway, and beyond these he knew nothing of it—no more than he knew of the track, and the spring, and the destiny of the unseen waters that wound their way beneath the herbage and the lilies at his feet, whether downward to nethermost depths of gloom, or outward to the fair freedom of the sea—none had told, or ever would tell.

"What is it?" she repeated, dreamily. "Well, beyond all, it is a long regret."

"Many regret who are but the prey of others."

"Perhaps; but *my* regret is—remorse."

"Well, may not even that oftentimes be noble?"

She gave a gesture of dissent, while the smile that had in it more sadness than tears though it had also her old careless satire in it, passed a moment over her face.

"You bade me once not ask you to turn sophist for my sake. Do not turn so now. You have your own bold broad creeds of simple honor and dishonor; keep to them; men wander too far from them into subtle windings now."

His teeth clinched on his beard with an agony of impotent impatience.

"O God! do not trifle with philosophies now! Answer me straightly, for the pity of Heaven; what *is* your life that you repent it thus?"

"I cannot tell you wholly. It is enough that it has forfeited all right to such a trust as yours."

"Nay, let *me* judge that, I say again. Let me judge fully—give me your confidence, your history; did I not swear to you that the *caro es* would never change *my*

fealty? I love *you*, my sovereign, my sorceress! What matters it to me whence you come, what you bring?"

His voice, that had been grave with a gentle command as he spoke the first words, sank down to the hot, vehement, reckless utterance of a love that was ready to take, risk, suffer, and imperil all things so that only the sweetness of her lips close once again on his, so that only the gift of her loveliness was yielded to him one hour.

She rose, and looked him once more in the eyes, with a serene, fathomless gaze of that pity and that reverence which blent strangely and intricately in the feeling she bore toward this man who was at once her slave and her defender.

"No," she said slowly; "it would matter nothing to you if you sought me as your mistress; but—as your wife? You told me once the stainlessness of your name was the only inheritance that you still held from your ancestors."

He gave a short, sharp sigh as though a knife had been plunged into the nerves that his wound had laid bare; her words bore but one significance to him. Ere she had time to resist, his arms were round her; he crushed her against his breast, he looked down into her eyes with a terrible longing prayer.

"Answer me," he said, hoarsely; "answer me yes or no, or you will kill me, and forgive me if the question is an outrage—you madden me till I must ask it. Is there any shame in your past life that forbids you to hold and keep a husband's honor?"

The last words sunk so low that they scarcely stirred the silence as they stole to her; for the moment she was silent; her head drooped on his bosom, her lips were breathless, voiceless; she longed for his sake to sever him from all communion with her, she desired for his sake to bid him leave forever one who must withhold from him all he had the just right to seek in the records of her past; she hesitated one instant whether she should not render herself up to his utmost abhorrence, that by this means, since none other could avail, he would be parted from her fate for evermore. Almost she chose the sacrifice; she had strength far passing that of women, and she had the generous self-abandonment of a nature which scorned self-pity,

and—once bending to love—loved nobly. She was silent; then as she looked up and saw the gaze wherewith he watched that silence which wrote on her a condemnation deadlier to him than words could ever have uttered, her courage forsook her, she had no force to yield herself up to his hatred and his loathing; to let him believe this of her was to let him be made desolate by a lie, and all the proud regal temper of her race arose and refused to bear falsely the yoke of shame even to save him, even to do toward him what she deemed her duty and his defense. She lifted her head, and looked him once again fully in the eyes, calmly, unflinchingly, though a flush of warmth came over her face.

"Nothing—in *your* sense. But in mine much."

"Thank God!—thank God! Against the world, against all destiny, ay, even against yourself, you SHALL be mine!"

He had never heard the last words; the first sufficed to make the wild joy course like fire through his veins, to light the future with the glory of unutterable gladness, to give her to him then and forever; his own, let all the earth stand against them, or let her own will forbid him her beauty and her tenderness as she would. The one agonized dread that had stifled him as with a hand of ice through the last moments was gone; he feared no other thing—not even death, since if that smote her it should strike him with the same blow.

He would not release her from his embrace; he held her there, with the loosened trail of her hair floating over his chest and his ceaseless kisses on her lips; he forgot that very hour of their lives might be numbered, that they had just broken from a prison, and a grave that might yawn afresh for them, and inclose them beyond hope ere even another day had passed; that he knew no more of her past now than he had known when first her hand had held the curled leaf filled with water to his parching lips in the Carpathian woods; he heeded nothing, remembered nothing, asked nothing, since her eyes had told him more surely yet than her words that no shame rested on her to divorce her in the sole sense in which he would accept shame to have the power to part them. It was neither the world's calumnious breath, nor the slander of rivaled lovers, that

could have terrors for the man who had pierced his way to her through dungeon walls, and torn off her the leopard fangs of Giulio Villaflor, and fought his passage with her through leveled weapons, and the storm of blows, and the battle of the hot Italian night. It was not for libel or for lie that he would surrender her—he who had thrown his manhood and his life on one reckless venture to secure her freedom, on one uncounted stake to touch her hand again.

While he had believed that he was no more to her than the hound beside them—nay, scarce so much—he had been content to hold his silence, to save her without thought of recompense, to obey her implicitly, and to hold her as high above him as the morning stars that, through the dawn, shone in the blue heights above the forest. But now that once he knew she loved him, it would have been easier to shake off a lion from his desert foe, when once the desert rage was at its height, than to force him to yield up the claim that her love gave him to Idalia.

"I knew it—I knew it!" he murmured, as he stooped his head over her, and wondered even yet whether this were aught but the sweet vain mockery of some mandragora-given dream. "Dishonor with you!—it were impossible. Ah, God! why will you belie yourself with such self-condemnation?—you who are noblest among women—who chose death rather than that villain's touch?"

"Hush! that was nothing. I should have been false indeed to all the traditions of my race if I had had fear of that moment's pang which the Pagan world held the signal of release—which Christians alone have raised into a gigantic nameless terror. But"—she drew herself from his arms as she spoke, and stood with the dignity that had awed even her Roman captor, blent with an infinitely gentler sadness than had ever been upon her—"do not cheat yourself with thinking that I have no errors on me. I have grave ones, dark ones. In your sense, it is true, there is nothing to part us; but in my own conscience there is much to make me unfit forever for such love as you bestow. See! I tell you that those men died at Antina through my work; I tell you that many more lives than theirs have been lost, sent to their graves by me; I tell

you that I have made all men who fell beneath my sway serve me for one end, not a mean one, indeed, but one to which I sacrificed everything and every one ruthlessly, and did more ruin than you ever dream, or I could ever measure. I tell you that the chief of my history must remain hidden from you—for awhile, at least; perhaps forever; and that if you had lived less in your wandering freedom and more in the intrigue of cities, you would have heard every evil, every danger, every unsparing sorcery, and every pitiless unscrupulousness attributed to my name, and—for the most part—rightly. Now, knowing this for the mere outline of a deadly truth, you can scarce call me 'noblest among women,' and you will be mad if into my hands you yield your future. Believe me, and fly from me while you may."

She stretched her hands out to him with a gesture of farewell, that had in it an exceeding tenderness; she loved him well enough to do for him what she had done for no other—save him from his own passions, spare him from herself.

He took her hands in his, and laid his lips on them in one long kiss; then lifted his head and raised his eyes to her with a regard in which a feeling far deeper than the mere voluptuous fervor of the senses, blent with a loyalty grave and calm as that of one who pledges his life, not lightly, but witting what he does—looked at her softly and thoughtfully.

"That is idle; I will never leave you *now* while there is breath in me. It may be that you have that which you repent of; few women have such sorcery as yours, and use it wholly blamelessly; but what I trust, is not your past but your future, and what I ask, is not your secret but your love. It is too late to speak of our ever parting; I will make you mine in the teeth of all, even of your own will, now that once you have let me know that your heart is with me. And—my love, my queen, my idol!—do you not think that I have tenderness enough in me to pardon much, if there be aught to pardon? Do you not think that I have jnstice enough to hold you in higher honor for your noble truth than I could ever hold the pale, poor, feckless virtue that should have no stain because it has no

glory, and had never fallen in any path because it followed coldly the straight one of self-interest? Oh, Idalia!—I can bring nothing worthy your genius and your loveliness, save a straight stroke to free you and a whole strength to love you; but since you have no scorn for those, take my future now and forever—I trust you as no man ever trusted woman."

He spoke from his inmost soul—spoke with that vivid, simple eloquence which came to him in moments of intense feeling; and it stirred her heart as none had ever stirred it; no qualities could have won the reverence of her wayward, dominant, and world-worn nature, as it was won by his chivalrous dignity of faith, his absolute refusal of the ignoble shame of suspicion. It broke down her force; it moved her to a sudden sweetness and warmth of utterance that he had not heard since that moment when she had stooped and touched his lips with her caress.

"Ah, my love, my love!" she murmured; "it is not *that*. *I* will never forsake you; *I* will never betray you; it is that my past, that my present——But since you will it so, be it so. I will break my chains for you, and lay down my evil sway forever. Call me your wife if you will; no wife shall dare for any, what I will dare for your sake!"

Then she let her head droop once more on his bosom, and wound her arms about him, and listened to the loud rapturous beating of his heart against her own, where they stood alone in the hushed twilight of the awakening day. And he only thought that the horrors of the past night were still upon her, and stronger even than her heroic strength, when a dreamy imperial smile passed one instant on her face, and her lips murmured with half disdain, with infinite tenderness,—

"Let them kill me if they will. I will be yours ere I die."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE STORY OF THE PAST.

WHEN the morning rose higher, and its light shone full on both their faces, his was warm, brilliant, eager with passionate delight; hers was grave, weary, very colorless. To him a very Eden opened; on her a thousand memories weighed. The one saw but the future; the other was pursued with the past. He knew that he had gained the only life that made his worth the living; she knew that she had drawn in with her own the only one that she had ever cared to save.

"Ah God! I bring you already only ill," she murmured, as the rays of the risen day, half shadowed still beneath the oak leafage, recalled to them that they were fugitives —fugitives from pursuers never yet known to spare. "You are wounded—you suffer now!"

He looked at her with the smile whose sweetness had more tenderness than lies in any words.

"If I do, I have no knowledge of it. A bruise!—a hatchet-stroke! Do you think I could remember *those?*"

"I do, at least. They were enough to stretch you as one dead but very lately——"

"A passing faintness, nothing more. Believe me, a thousand wounds like these would never harm me. I have been half a soldier all my days."

"So have I."

And as she spoke she rent off some of the delicate white laces of her mask dress, and steeped them in the little spring that bubbled under the oak stems till they were cool and soft as lint, and tore asunder a broad strip of the scarlet silk of her Venetian domino and laid the wet laces on it.

"Stoop down," she said, softly, to him—a singular softness, so gentle that in itself it was a caress had come upon her toward him.

He stooped to her as she bade him, but his hands drew the broidered ribbons away.

"Not so. *You* shall not serve me."

"Why not? You have earned your right to service, if man ever earned it."

The breath of her lips was on his brow, her eyes looked into his with a love the deeper for the dew of unshed tears that glistened heavily in them, her hands touched him, making the pulses of his heart throb faster and the current of the blood glow in his veins, while, with a gentleness that in itself seemed to him balm enough to heal mortal wounds themselves, she wound the silken bands over the gash that the blunted axe had hacked, and the width of his chest that the rain of blows had covered with livid marks like the marks where a scourge has fallen.

"Ah! God grant that these be the last and the least things you suffer through me."

The words escaped her almost unconsciously, while for the first time since her eyes had gazed in their set anguish on the dead men lying round her in the banqueting-hall of Antina, the tears gathered in them like the gathering drops of a storm, and fell one by one slowly on his hair and on his breast. She had made many endure danger and wretchedness, risk and despair, without pity; it was but fitting retribution that she had no power to ward them off from the only life for which she had ever cared.

He held her hands close against his heart.

"I can never suffer *now!*"

It seemed so to him. Keeping this, her love, he thought that no vicissitude or bitterness of life could have an hour's power to move him; that no fate could approach him which had any shadow on it; that nothing men or fortune could deal unto him could ever move him to an instant's pang. He did not dream that there are gifts, breathlessly, burningly coveted, which are more disastrous reached than lost. Like Faustus, he would have said to the future and its fate.

"Take
My soul forever to inherit,
To suffer punishment and pine,
So this woman may be mine!"

And his noble reckless chivalry of belief in her had alike the sublimity and the blindness which lie at the core of every chivalrous idealism; blent, too, with something grander and something loftier still—a love that cleaved to her through all and in the teeth of all—a love that could find her human and darkened by human stains, yet never lose its worship, but reach high, even high as pardon, if need there were of any pardon's tenderness.

The day was waking; the sun had risen; even here, through the darkness of the oak boughs, the radiance was coming. He started to his feet, made as strong to save her now as though the force of a score of lives was poured into his own; of pain, of weakness, of the aching fever that thrilled through his bruised limbs, he knew nothing. He seemed to have the strength of Titans, to have lost every sense of existence save those of its deep delight, its wild joys, its dreamy ecstasy.

"My love, my love, forgive me," he murmured. "In the heaven you have brought me I forgot your danger."

"Was it not best forgot?" she asked, with that carelessness and that sadness which mingled intricately in her nature. "In a race for life and death, few would pause to speak as we have done; but it is the surest wisdom to defy fate while we can."

"Fate? There is no fate, save such as a strong hand carves, or a weak hand spoils, in Life."

"Nay, am *I* not yours?"

She stooped to him with her old half-mocking sorcery, her loosened hair brushing his breast, her rich lips near his own, her eyes, deep with thought, humid with tears, yet luminous with that victorious challenge which was without pity, and which had so often defied men to have strength or power to deny her as their destiny. The old evil passed over her for a moment—the old evil of triumph in the unmerciful, unsparing knowledge that a human life was hers to do with as she would, as a crown of roses lies in a child's wanton hands to be treasured or trodden down at will.

He looked at her with a long wistful gaze, earnest as an unspoken prayer, and once more the darker and the more callous tyranny that had for one instant returned

on her was softened and banished and driven back by the pure strength of an undivided loyalty, by the undivided trust of a brave man's heart.

"You know it," he answered her. "Why play with me in speech when you hold my life in your power?"

The patience and gentleness of the rebuke touched her as had never done those florid vows, those ornate protestations, such as she had heard so often until she was as wearied by them as eyes that dwell long on the dazzling hues of jewels ache with their glitter and their profusion. Others had loved her as well as he, even with this depth, this might, this absolute submission of all existence to her, yet in him these had a dignity and a simplicity that claimed a reverence no other had done—these in him made her worthless of them in her own sight.

"Ah, forgive me!" she said, with that contrition which in a woman thus proud, and of old thus unyielding as she was, had at once so much of poignancy, so much of self-reproach. "I wish only it were otherwise! I wish only that your fate were safely anchored in some pure and peaceful life mine could not touch. Why *will* men ever love where love is fatal?"

He looked at her with earnest thought, grave and infinitely tender.

"Fatal? What is it that you fear for me?"

"All things."

"All! That is to place but little trust in my strength to endure or to resist. What is it you dread most?"

"Myself."

She gave him back his look, intent as his own, fathomless, and filled with a pain that was half remorse, half prescience.

His face grew very pale.

"You mean—you will desert me?"

"No. Not that."

She spoke slowly, as if each word were a pang, then leaned toward him once more with the light of the risen day full on her face, and the splendor of her eyes troubled beyond grief.

"No. I never broke a trust; and yours is the noblest ever placed in me. But—cleaving to me—you will have

bitter trials for your faith; you will have, most likely, cruel suffering that I shall be powerless to spare you; you will lose me, perhaps, by captivity, by shot, or by steel, you will pay for me, it may be, if ever I am yours, no less price yourself than death. *Now* do you not know why, though it rent my heart in twain, I would surrender you up, and never look upon your face again, my love—my love!—would you but take my warning?"

The first words had been almost cold from their enforced control; with the last a yearning, aching desire trembled in her voice, which would have told him, had no other moment told him, that what she felt for him was not pity nor gratitude, but passion itself. He heard in silence to the end, as one who has his own resolve set immutably, and listens to the utterance of counsel that has no more likelihood to make him swerve from it than the beating of the winds to move the rocks that they pass over. Not that he heard her lightly, or believed that undue fear made her count the peril for him with needless exaggeration; he knew this was not in her nature, but he was wholly careless of what price might be exacted from him for allegiance to her, and he was as firm to cleave to it, whatever that price might be, as a soldier to cleave to his standard while there is sight enough left in his dying eyes to watch one gleam of the silken folds above his head that shall never droop through him till men have killed, not conquered, him. Then, holding her hands against his heart, he looked down on her with that graver and more chastened tenderness which, mingled with the vivid ardor of his love, born from the darkness of danger that was still around them, and from the defense that through it she, so brilliant, so fearless, and so negligent, had come to need from his strength and from his fealty. In her intellect, in her ambitions, in her carelessness and magnificence of sovereignty, he was content that she should reign far beyond him, content to know that she reached many realms which he had barely dreamed of; but in her necessity, in her peril, in her desolation, he took up his title as a man to guard her, his right as a man to shield her, and to save her, if it should need be, even from herself.

"We will speak no more of that; our fates, whatever

they be, will be the same," he answered her. "It may be that I shall suffer through you, as you say; if so, it will be without complaint, while I can still be dear to you. If death come—well; it had little terror for us last night—it will have none for me, if it be only merciful enough to spare me life without you. As for faith—oh God! believe enough in me to know that no trial will exhaust it. If silence be bound on you, I will wait till you can break it with honor. I have no fear of what it guards from me. Love were of little worth that could not yield so slight a thing as trust."

"A slight thing? It is a greater gift than the gift of crowns or kingdoms—and far more rare."

She had heard him, moved deeply by the brave simplicity of the generous words; her face was very pale, her head bowed; in her own sight she was unworthy of this sublime unquestioning belief, and the knowledge entered like iron into her soul.

"Is it?" he answered her. "Then all love is a lie. However that be, take it as *my* gift to you, then; I have nothing else in the world to bring."

She looked at him with that long, grave, weary look of which he could not wholly read the meaning.

"You could bring me none I could prize more, or—could deserve less."

"That cannot be. If you did not merit it, you would see no treasure in it. It is not those who value trust that betray it."

"Betray it! No; I never betrayed yet."

Her face wore for a moment the prouder and fearless look of royal courage and strength that had ever been most natural to it; then, swiftly, it changed, and a darkness fell over it—the darkness of remorse.

"That is not true," she said, bitterly. "Betrayal—in men's sense of betrayal of comrade to comrade, of friend to friend, of honor to honor—never yet did touch me. But I betrayed as women always do—all those who loved me."

He watched her wistfully, but silently; his heart ached that there should be this shadow of unrevealed remorse between them; his knowledge of her told him that Idalia was not a woman to let slight regrets weigh on her, or

slight errors stir her conscience into pain; he knew that among the wild-olive crown of her genius and her power some poisoned leaf of the belladonna must be wound, brilliant but life-destroying. It was acute suffering to him; she was to him as luminous, glorious, divine, and far above him as the sun itself; that across this sun of his life there should lie these black and marring shadows, gave him pain deep as his love. But loyalty was with him before all; and beyond the reckless resolve of a blind passion, that would possess what it adored, though the possession should be accursed, there was the noble fealty he had sworn to her—the brave, patient, chivalrous trust which left unasked whatever she wished untold, and was contented to believe and wait.

He stooped to her, tenderly passing over her latest words.

"Weary yourself no more with the past," he said, gently; a gentleness that was sweet to her, like the lulling murmur of calm waters after the blaze and riot of the voluptuous color of tropic forests. "We have to think of the present and the future. Every moment is precious; I have been too forgetful of your safety. You know better than I where your enemies lie, and how best they may be baffled. There is one who will not spare——"

"There are hundreds who will not. The land is as a net for me."

"Then we must leave it——"

"Is it so easy to leave such close-woven meshes?"

"Easy, no. Possible, yes."

"And how?"

"That we will speak of later; for the present moment you must have food and rest. There will surely be some charcoal-burner's or contadina's hut here somewhere; there is nothing hardly to fear from the peasantry in the forests or open country, and we must wait till nightfall for further flight. Stay an instant while I look around us——"

"But you are not fit for any exertion! Your wound, your faintness——"

He smiled on her; and the light of the smile had a strange, sad beauty, that touched her with a pang, keen in pain and yet not without its sweetness.

"Those were nothing. Such as they were, you cured them. I think I have the strength of lions now."

He left her, and, going up where the earth rose precipitously, looked down the great dim aisles of forest that stretched away on every side, with the far unerring sight of a man who had known what it was to go through the heart of Persia with his life hanging on the sureness of his eye and aim, and who had ridden over the grass seas of Mexico and steered down the lonely windings of the Amazons, when with every moment a spear thrown from behind him, or an arrow launched from the dense screen of foliage, might end his years there and then forever. He stood motionless some instants, not a sign of bird, or beast, or vegetable life in the woodlands round escaping him; he had learned all such forest lore of Indians and Gauchos, and he had a traveler's swift sweep of vision, with a soldier's rapid tactic and decision; the horses were grazing quietly near, too tired to stray, and watched, moreover, by Sulla, who had, unbidden, taken their guardianship. In a few moments longer he returned to her.

"There is some one living a score yards onward, or I am much mistaken; wait here while I reconnoiter, and if you need me, fire; I will be with you at the first echo of the shot."

He loaded the pistol that had fallen on the grass by her, and put it back into her hand, then thrust the boughs aside, and made his way to where, at some slight distance, the hut of some woodland dweller stood; a faint low flicker of smoke, curling among the thickness of the leaves, had told him rightly there was some human habitation, and, though it was but a poor cabin, rudely built of loose stones and woven branches, it was more welcome to him than a palace would have been. He knew the Italian people as well as he knew the Border peasantry at home, and knew that they were gentle, kindly, and generous in the main. The hut stood in a very wilderness of beauty, wild vine, and the sweet fig beloved of Horace, gigantic pines, and the wood-strawberry that nestled in the grass, in their profuse and vivid contrast making a paradise around it, while in its rear the high slope of pine-covered hills rose dark and massive, with falling waters tumbling down their steep

incline into a broad still pool beneath, that was never stirred unless by the plunge of some diving water-bird. A young female child, with a rich Guido face and the step of a princess in her rags, was the only living thing found there; she answered him readily, balancing her water-jar as she came from the torrent like some Pompeian Naiad; her father had gone to his work at dawn; he was a charcoal-burner, and he would not return till evening; the stranger was welcome to shelter; and food—well, there was no food except some millet-cakes, and a bit of dried fish from the fresh water; he could have that, if he wanted. Any one near? Oh no, there was no one for ten miles or more round, except one or two huts like hers. She was a picturesque, handsome little forester, bare-legged and scarce clothed, yet with a wild freedom of movement, and a certain pensive grace thoroughly national; very like the beautiful mournful models, Campagna-born, of Rome, who look like living poems, and who have but one thought—*bajocchi.*

"It is a miserable place for you, yet it will give us some sort of harbor," he said, as he brought Idalia to the carbonaro's cabin.

She looked across a moment at the luxuriance of vine and blossom, and backward at the black pine-mass, through which the falling waters glared like light, and smiled half wistfully as she looked.

"I think it is a paradise! To forget the world amid such loveliness as this—what do you say? Would it be wise? And yet—power is a dangerous thing; once having drunk of it, one has lost taste for every purer flavor. You do not know what that is? You do not know what ambition is, then? I can tell you; it is satiety *with* desire."

"A bitter thing then?"

"Yes. But not so bitter that it is not sweeter than all sweetness—only the sweetness so soon goes, and the dregs are so soon all we hold!"

He did not answer; his heart ached that he was not able to bring dominion to this woman, who was so born for it; that he had no diadem such as that of her foregone Byzantine sires to crown her with; that he had nothing wherewith to achieve greatness—nothing wherewith to con-

tent that desire, half disdainful yet undying, which was in her for the scepter and the sword, for all they ruled and all they gained.

He left her in the inner chamber of the hut, that was roughly partitioned in two by a wall of stakes and woven rushes, and brought the horses under the shelter of a great cedar that shut out every ray of the sun; he could use his left arm but little, owing to the shoulder-wound, but he loosened their girths, watered them, gave them a feed of rye from some corn that the cotters kept for bread, then bathed, and shook his *barcarolo* dress into the best order that it would assume, and thought what food in this wild waste he could find for her. That he was anhungered and athirst himself, that there was fever on him still from his injuries, and that, despite the plunge into the waters' refreshing coldness, his bruised frame ached and his breath was hard to draw, he scarcely felt; Idalia was his only memory. For her, he could have not alone the lion's strength that he had said, but a woman's gentleness, an Indian's patience, an Arab's keenness; and nothing was too slight for him to heed, as nothing too great for him to brave, that could be offered in her service and her cause. That he had had no sleep, no rest, no food, weighed nothing with him; in the heat of the early day he sought with unwearying diligence for such things as he thought could tempt her. Wild strawberries on their own mosses; beccaficos that haunted the place, and that he slew with a sling and baked in clay; dainty fish that he speared with the knife from his sash, wading waist-deep in the pool—these were all the woods would yield him. But love for her had made him an artist and a poet; he served them in such graceful fashion, covering the rude table of the cabin with a cloth of greenest moss, and screening the coarse-hewn wooden trenchers with vine-leaves and flowers, that it was rather like such a forest banquet as Theocritus or Ben Jonson loved to cast in verse than like the meal in a wretched refuge of fugitives, for whom every moment might bring the worst terrors of captivity and death.

When it was done—that travail of willing, tender service—he could have swept it down again with a stroke of his hand.

"I am a fool," he thought, with a smile that had a sigh in it. "A child might thank me for those trifles; but she—wild strawberry-leaves for one who wants the laurels of fame, the gold foliage of a diadem!"

Yet he stooped down again, and changed the garniture a little, so that the snow-white arums might lie nearer the scarlet of the fruit. He had a painter's heart, and instinct told him that beauty in the lowliest things has ever a sweet psalm of consolation in it; he loved, and his love unconsciously told him that a coil of forest flowers is a better utterance of it than all the gold of Ophir.

It was not wasted on her, this which he deemed so idle a trifle that she would not even note it. As her glance fell on the woodland treasures that the hands, which a few hours before had been clinched in a mortal gripe at her foe's throat, had gathered to cover the poverty of their refuge, Idalia's eyes filled with soft sudden tears—eyes that had so often looked down with cold, amused, careless scorn on those who wooed her with every courtly subtlety, with every potent magnificence of bribe.

"What depths of exhaustless tenderness there are in his heart!" she thought. "I might gaze *there* forever and find no base thing! O God! if he could say that of mine."

The day went on its way deepening to the full heat of noon, cloudless, sultry, lustrous, as such days of summer length in southern lands alone can be; to him it was like one long unbroken dream, divine, voluptuous, intense as the radiance around them. They were safe here in the heart of the untrodden forest—safe, until with the fall of night their flight could be resumed. Within the darkness of the hut, the moss and foliage he had strewn everywhere made couches yielding as velvet, and filled the air with their fresh fragrance, with the gleam of the white flowers flashing in the gloom; without stretched the vivid light and endless growth of the woodland, the glow of color, the foam of water, the play of sun-rays upon a thousand hills, and, above all, the deep blue of an Italian sky. Beyond, under the great cedar, the horses browsed and rested, with broad shadows flung upon them cool and dark; all the fantastic foliage ran riot like a forest of the tropics; here and there an oriole flashed like gold in the sun; here

and there the rich green of a lizard glanced among the grasses; all else was still and motionless, steeped in the sensuous lull of southern heat.

In such a day, in such a scene, danger and pain were forgot, as though they had no place on earth; they were alone; the young peasant-child went hillward after her single goat; there was not a sound or a sign of other life than theirs, and the oblivion of passion was upon them both; they ceased to remember that they were fugitives—they only knew that they were together.

They spoke very rarely; she let the past, with all its mystery and all its bitterness, drift away forgotten. To the future neither looked; it might lead to the dungeon or the scaffold. They lived in the present hour alone, as those who love do ever live, in the first abandonment and usurpation of their passion.

Once she looked down at him where he lay at her feet, and passed her hand among the richness of his hair.

"Does the earth hold another man capable of such sublime folly as yours? You give me your life; yet never ask me once of mine?"

"What marvel in that? You have said, you wish silence on it."

"And how many would heed such a wish?"

"I know not how many would. But it is law to me."

"Ah! you are rash as Tannhauser. I told you so long ago."

"And I said then as now, Tannhauser was a cur. She was *his;* knowing that, what wanted he? If he had had faith aright, and love enough, he would have wrested her out from the powers of darkness. He would not have yielded her up—not even to herself. Evil is black in us all; love, that is love in my reading, does not surrender us to it, or for it."

The deep glow of his eyes gazed into hers, speaking a thousandfold more than his words. He knew that the chains of some remorse bound her; to fear this for himself never dawned on the careless courage of that which she had well termed his "sublime folly," but to free her from its dominion was a resolve with him not less resolute than had been his resolve to deliver her beauty from her captor's fetters.

Her face was softened to a marvelous richness, sadness, and pathos as he looked up at her—the gloom of the low-shelving roof above and behind them, the light of the day falling on her and about her, through the hanging leaves, from the burning sun without.

"You like better the passion of the 'Gott und die Bajadere' poem? Well, so do I. It is nobler far. The god had faith in her, and, *because* he believed in her, saved her. Brave natures, defying scorn, may grow to merit scorn; but no brave nature ever yet was steeled and false to trust."

"And yours is brave to the death; wherefore, till death, I trust it."

His words were low, and sweet, and earnest; grave with that depth of meaning and of feeling which made reverence, not less than pity, move her toward the only man who had ever stirred her either to compassion or to veneration, and which gave grandeur, force, and nobility to the love which, without it, might have been but a madness of the heart and a desire of the senses.

"False women vow, as well as true—I vow you nothing," she murmured to him; "but—I thank you beyond all words."

She did so thank him from her soul; she to whom this faith was precious as no other thing could have been, since she knew at once that she had forfeited all title to claim, all likelihood to gain it, yet knew that very often calumny had wronged and envy stained her with many a charge of which she had been as guiltless as the white arums that lay unsullied at her feet. That strong, undoubting, imperishable trust was the one jewel of life that she had of her own will renounced her title to, yet which she could value as no other, perhaps, who had not lost it, ever could have done so well.

"Listen," she said, stooping over him where he was stretched on the foliage at her feet, while her hand strayed still with a caress among his hair and over his lips. "So much of my life as I can tell you I will—it is not a thousandth part, still it may make some things clearer to you. I am of Greek birth, as you know; and I doubt if there be in the world a descent that can claim greater names than mine. My race—nay, both races that were blent in

me—stretched far back into the earliest Athenian times on one hand, and to the records of Byzantium on the other. I was the last to represent the pure Greek stock, and it was the one of which I was the prouder, though it had fallen into evil fortunes and much poverty. Of the Byzantine, there was but one besides myself, the brother of my dead mother, a strange man; a rich, wayward, luxurious recluse; a feudal prince, where he held his chieftainship in Roumelia; leading an existence more like an eastern story than aught else; magnificent, voluptuous, barbaric, solitary, with all the glitter of Oriental pomp and all the loneliness of a mountain fief. A terrible tragedy that had occurred in his youth—I can tell it to you some other time—begot his love of solitude; his passions and his tastes led him to make that solitude at once a palace and a prison, a harem and a fortress. I have little doubt that his life was evil enough; but I did not know it, and he loved me with a lavish tenderness that left me fearless of him, though he had a great terror for all others. So the life I led from my birth to my sixteenth year was this: sometimes I passed long months in Greece, in a great, desolate, poverty-stricken palace, with vast deserted gardens, in which I wandered looking at the bright Ægean, while dreaming of the dead glories of my people, with an Armenian monk, old, and stern, and learned, for my only guide, who taught me all I would—more, perhaps, of abstruse lore, and strange scenes, and deep knowledge than was well for me while so young. Ere I had seen the world I was steeped in it, from the telling of Roman cynics, and Athenian sages, and Persian magi, and Byzantine wits. I believed with all the credulous innocence of my own childhood, and I disbelieved with all the scornful skepticism of my dead masters. I had studied more deeply while I was yet a child than many men do in their whole lifetime. From that lonely meditative life in Greece I was often changed, as by magic, to the unbridled luxury and indulgence of the Roumelian castle. Slaves forestalled my every wish; splendor, the most enervating that could be dreamt of, surrounded me within, while the grandest natural beauty was everywhere without; if vice there were, I never saw it, but the most gorgeous pleasures amused me, and my bid-

ding was done like the commands of an empress, for I was the adopted heir of the great Julian, Count Vassalis. Now can you not imagine how two such phases of life, alternating in their broadest and most dangerous contrasts from my earliest memory upward, made me fatal indeed to others, but to none so fatal as to myself?"

She laid her hands on his lips to arrest the words he would have spoken, and passed on in her narrative.

"No. No denial. God grant I be not fatal at the last to you. Well, it was these two dissimilar lives that made me what I am. I was happy then in both; happy, dreaming in poverty in Greece; happy, dreaming in magnificence in Roumelia; ambitious already, ambitious as any Cæsar in both. In Athens I had the poetry and the purity of glory in me; in Turkey its power and its pomp allured me. Both, combined with the knowledge of my past heritage in Hellenic fame, and of my future heritage in the Vassalis dominion, gave me the pride of an emperor and the vision of an empire wide as the world. Ah Heaven! yet the dreams were pure, too—purer and loftier than anything that life can realize. For I did not dream for myself alone. I dreamed of peoples liberated, of dynasties bound together by love of the common good, of the Free Republics revived by my hand, and shedding light in all dark places where creeds reigned and superstitions crouched, of misery banished, of age revered, of every slavery of custom broken, of every nobler instinct followed, of men made brethren and not beasts of prey, who hunt down and devour the young, the weak, the guiltless. Ah Heaven! what dreams they were."

Her head sank, her eyes were fixed on the flood of light without, her thoughts were far from him, far beyond him, in that moment, as the thoughts of genius ever are far from those who love the thinker best, and are best loved in answer.

They were with the dreams of her youth; such dreams as lighted the youth of Vergniaud and found their fruition on the scaffold.

'Well, with you they never perished?"

"No, not utterly. But they were tainted, how deeply tainted! Well, thus I lived, a fairy story and a pageantry

filling one-half my years, monastic seclusion and heroic memories holding the rest. As I grew older, Julian Vassalis often spoke with me of many things; he was a bold, magnificent, kingly, reckless man, a chief who answered to none, a voluptuary who laughed at the world he had quitted, a genius who might have ruled widely and wisely with a Sulla's iron hand, a Sulla's careless laughter. He found me like him, and he made me yet more like. It might be—but it is not for my lips to blame him—he loved me well in life, and strove, so far as prescience could, to guard me when his life ended. That was in my sixteenth year. He bequeathed me all his vast properties, with the fief in Roumelia and other estates, requiring only that I took his name, and, wherever I wedded, never changed it. It is through him that I became one of the richest women in Europe; much is gone, but great wealth still remains with me. Can you not fancy what I was eight years ago, with the world before me, untried, unknown, with passion untouched, with ambition still but in its sweet vague ideals, with innocence as soilless as those lilies, and courage fearless as the courage of the young eagles? Can you marvel that I believed I should have the sovereignty of Semiramis? Can you not understand how easily I credited those who for their own ends deluded me to the belief?"

Her face darkened as she spoke, and her voice sank with a thrill of hate in it. He caught it, and his own voice took her tone.

"Tell me who they were. If they be living——"

The menace recalled her from the past to the present.

"No. That is one of many things I cannot tell you yet, if ever. From no love of mystery—I abhor it—but from a brutal inexorable necessity, as little to be escaped from as the destiny of the ancients. *We* know that there is no such thing as destiny, but we make as hard a task-master for ourselves out of our own deeds. Of my childhood I can speak freely, but from Julian Vassalis's death dates the time that I must in so much leave a blank to you. Those were with me who knew how to touch every chord in my nature, and they used their power ably. I was ambitious; they tempted my ambition. I loved sovereignty; they pointed to such realms as might have dazzled wiser

heads than mine when I first stood on that giddy eminence of command, and riches, and splendor, and was told that I had the beauty of a Helen, while I knew that I had the courage of men, and felt even stir in me men's genius and men's force. Do not deem me vain that I say this. God knows all vanity is dead in me, if I ever had it, and I think that I was at all times too proud to be guilty of that foible. And it was by higher things than such frailty that they lured me. I loved freedom; I loved the peoples; I rebelled against the despotism of mediocrities, the narrow bonds of priesthoods; I had the old liberties of Greece in my veins, and I had the passionate longing for an immortal fame that all youth, which has any ideal desires at all, longs for with the longing 'of the moth for the star.' Well, through these, by these, I fell into the snares of those who draped their own selfish greeds and intrigues in the colors of the freedom that I adored; who knew how to tempt me with the pure laurels of a liberator, while in truth they bound me with the fetters of a slave."

He did not speak, but looked at her, with his lips breathless, with his eyes passionate as fire, through the mist that dimmed them as he heard. Hearing no more than this, her life seemed known in its every hour to him; he understood her more nearly, more deeply, than any man had ever done; more truly far than those whose genius and whose aspirations had far more closely been akin with hers.

She looked at him and sighed.

"Wait. Do not think me blameless because in the outset I was wronged. I tell you that I have great sins at my score. True, at the time I speak of now, I was sinned against, not sinning. I was led to ally myself in earliest youth with those whom later years have shown me were desperate, insatiate, unscrupulous, guilt-stained gamesters, who staked a nation's peace to win a gambler's throw, and played at patriotism as keenly and as greedily as men play for gold. I was dazzled, intoxicated, beguiled, misled at once by all that was best and all that was worst in me; and, too late, I found the truth, found every avenue of retreat closed, found myself bound beyond escape, found that——"

She paused abruptly, shutting in the words, but the hand that lay in his contracted as though it grasped a weapon wherewith to requite a deadly, endless wrong.

"So far I was sinned against," she went on, with effort, as though the memories which arose stifled her with poisonous fumes. "But in all else the evil is mine. The sway was guilty that had been put into my hands, but I grew to love it as we grow to love the opium that we hate at first. All power had irresistible fascination for me, and I learned to use mine pitilessly; and I should use it so to-morrow to all save you. The political career into which I had been plunged had its sorcery for me; I delighted in it even while I abhorred it. I soon learnt how to play on men's passions until from them I gained what I would. If my instruments were broken under my hands, I never heeded it; they had served my end, and the end was great still, though its means were accursed; the end was still the liberties of the nations. The truth did not come to me till I had gone too far to draw back, too far not to be enamored of the merciless dominion that I found I could command. When I knew it, I grew wholly reckless. I had been foully, basely wronged, and all that was dangerous in me rose and hardened. I had been stabbed in the dark by hands that were sworn to shield me. I cared little what I did, nothing for what was said of me, after that. I am not justifying myself; I merely show you what fires they were which burned me heartless. I have been associated with every movement of the advanced parties of Europe through the years that have gone by since I first became the Countess Vassalis; I have been the inspirer of more efforts, the guide of more intrigues, than I could tell you in a score of hours, even were I free to tell you them; I have held in my time, indirectly, more power than many a minister whose name is among the rulers; the world does not know how it is governed, and it does not dream how kings have dreaded and statesmen sought to bribe me. One thing alone I remained true to, heart and soul—my cause. For the freedom of the peoples, for the breaking of their chains, I have labored with all such strength and brain and force as nature gave me. In that I have been true, and without taint of selfish desires. God knows that to raise my own land among the nations, and to gain Italy for the Italians, and to do—were it ever so little—to crush the tyrannies of creeds, to bring nearer the daylight of

fearless and unfettered truth, I would let Giulio Villaflor and his creatures kill me as they would. In that I have been loyal to the core, but in all else I have been very guilty. I have tempted, blinded, seduced men into the love that gave them as wax into my hands. I have roused their darkest passions, that of those passions I might make the firebrands or the swords my purpose needed. I have taken their peace and crushed it to powder; I have taken their hearts and broken them without a pause of pity; I have sent them out to the slaughter careless how they fell, so that my will was done; I have sent them out to perish, far and wide, north and south, east and west, and never asked the cost of all that gold of human life wherewith I played my pitiless gambling. I smiled at those for whom I cared no more than for the stones of that torrent; I let them hope I loved them, so long as that hope was needed to make them ready instruments to my using; I was stirred no more by despair than I was for compassion. So long as I had my slaves, I heeded nothing what they suffered, how they were captured. I only smiled at the fools who thought women had no share in the making of history, no power to penetrate the arcana of life! That was all."

He listened, and a heavy sigh answered her as she paused; it was involuntary, unconscious. He had believed in Idalia, as with a woman's absolute unquestioning belief; it struck him hardly, deeply, to know by her own telling that she had these ruined broken lives, these Circean cruelties in her past; that the witching splendor of her sorcery had been thus steeped in tears of blood, thus bartered for the gain of triumph and dominion. No fear for himself even now crossed him; his courage was too bold, his passion too ardent. It was the knowledge that she should thus have stained the beauty and the genius of her life which came on him, not unlooked for, since he had ere this known that there were error and remorse upon her; yet bitter as the fall of what is treasured and is reverenced must ever be, however love remain faithful and unshaken to that fall's lowest depth.

"One question only," he said to her, while his voice was low and tremulous. "Through this, was there never one whom you loved?"

She met his gaze fully, thoughtfully, truly he could have sworn, or never eyes spoke truth.

"Not one!"

"Is it possible?"

She smiled a little, with her old weary irony.

"Very possible. Poets have written much about the love of women; I do not think it a tithe so warm and strong as the love of men. Many women are cold sensualists, many are inordinately vain; sensualism and vanity make up nine-tenths of my sex's passions, though sentimentality has so long refused to think so."

"But you must have been surrounded by so many—by all that was most brilliant and most seductive?"

"Yes; yet a tinsel brilliancy, for the most part. Besides, I did not come into the world ignorant of it, as most youth comes. Julian Vassalis, and my own tastes, and others who influenced me then, had given me the surest shield against the follies of love in studies deeper far than most women, if they had driven away my faith in life too early, with the sneers of Persius, with the scourge of Juvenal, with their own cynic wit and their own manifold knowledge. Ambition was infinitely more the passion to tempt me than love ever was. I luxuriated in the sense of my own power, in the exercise of my own fatal gifts; but I scorned from the bottom of my heart the men who were fooled by such idle things as a girl's glance, as a woman's smile. If the gold gleam of my hair ensnared them, I could not but disdain what was so easily bound; if they were spaniels at my word, I knew they had been, or they would be, as weakly slaves of any other who succeeded me, and as easily subjugated by a courtesan as they were by me, when I chose to use the power. I thought very scornfully of love. I saw its baser side, and I held it a madness of men by which women could revenge a thousandfold the penalties of sex that shut us out from public share in the world's government. A statesman is great, a woman can make him a wittol; a chief is mighty, a woman can make him a byword of shame and reproach; a soldier has honor firm as steel, a woman can make him break it like a stalk of green flax; a poet has genius to gain him immortality, a woman can make him curse the world and its fame for

her sake, and die like a dog, raving mad for the loss of scarlet lips that were false, of eyes divine that were lies. No power! We have the widest of all! Well, I but knew that better than most, and used it yet more unmercifully than most. And I think what gave that power tenfold into my hands was that one fact—that the weakness of love never for one instant touched me myself, that the temptations of love never tempted me for an instant, that my intellect alone dealt with them, and my heart remained ever cold."

"And—God!—it has wakened for me? How is it possible? What have I that those had not? I have nothing on earth whereby to be worthy of you—whereby to have won you?"

His life was so sweet with its rapture, his passion was so blind with its victory, he scarce remembered those who had so vainly suffered before him. Every happiness is selfish, more or less; and his was so in that moment. She half smiled, and let her head droop over him, till her lips touched his again:

"Who can answer for love? Others have done as much for me as you—others have loved me, even as well as you; but——"

"None had yours in answer?"

He asked it eagerly, breathlessly, still; this was all that he doubted in her past—that some other life had reigned before him in that heart which beat so near to his.

"No! A thousand times no, if you care for the denial. Love was my tool, he was never my master."

She spoke with her old imperial dignity of disdain for those follies of feeling and of the senses which sway mankind so widely and so idly. Then the scorn faded from her eyes, a weariness stole there instead; her voice sank, and lost its pride in the contrition of self-accusing memories, of heart-sick confession.

"But do not honor me for that. It made my crime, I think, the deeper. Those senseless women, whom I have so often contemned, with all the contempt that was in me, for their maudlin romances, their emotional sentiment, which make them see a god in every commonplace mortal, and give them idols as many as the roses in summer, are, after

all, perhaps, truer and better—fools though they be—than I. Their emotions, at least, are real, however fleeting, vain, and shallow. But I—leave me when you know it, if you will, but know it you shall—never felt one faintest touch of tenderness for any one of those who loved me, yet I was merciless enough, sinful enough, shameful enough, if you will, never to let one among them know that, until he was deep enough in my toils to have no power to loose himself from them. I let them hope, I let them believe, I let them think their reward sure, until such time as they were mine—courage and honor and body and soul all mine—to use as I would, for the ends and in the cause of my ambitions. I let them think I loved them, and then I used their minds or their hands, their names or their strength, whichever I needed to take; and I never asked once, I never once pitied, when I knew that their hearts were broken. Go—you must think me guilty enough now. Go—for if your trust be dead, rend me out of your life once and forever at a blow, rather than pass your years with what you doubt."

She put him from her as she spoke, and rose; her face was very pale, grave with a profound sadness, with a set resolution; the words cost her more than it would have cost her to have thrust the Venetian dagger into her bosom to escape the pursuit of Giulio Villaflor, but they were spoken without a pause to spare herself; she loved him better than herself, and she knew that unless this man's faith were perfect in her, the lives of both would be a hell. And Idalia was too proud a woman to allow such faith to be given in error and in ignorance, unmerited.

His breath was sharply drawn, as under a keen physical pain; he stood and looked at her, with a look that was revenge enough for all the unpitying cruelties of her past; it was so unconsciously a rebuke, so silently and terribly in its pain a condemnation passing words.

For the first time under his gaze her proud head drooped, her eyes filled with tears of shame, the paleness of her face flushed; before the noble truth of his every act and word, the bold simplicity of his creeds of honor, her own life looked to her very guilty, very far from the fair light of justice and of loyalty.

"Leave me," she said to him, briefly, though her voice was very low. "But—do not *you* reproach me."

In answer his arms were stretched to her, and drew her to his breast; in that moment he had command over her, in that moment he was not her slave, but her judge. His face was grave and almost stern, for he suffered keenly, but his voice and his touch were infinitely gentle.

"Leave you? You think I know so little how to value a woman who has the noblest virtue on earth—truth?"

"Truth! when I have told you my whole life was, in one sense, a lie?"

"Truth—*because* you have so told me. Oh, my beloved! know me better than this. Can I not condemn your errors, and yet cherish you but the more because you need some pity and some pardon?"

She lay silent in his arms, deeper smitten than by any rebuke or execration by the unutterable tenderness of this love that was too true to truth to hold her guiltless, and too true to itself to forsake her because it condemned her. In that moment she knew how much greatness there was in this man's nature, how much dignity in his passion.

"But your trust, your faith?" she said at last, as she looked up at him.

"Will be with you ever, as my love will be."

He stooped and leant his cheek on hers, while low in her ear a few words stole; he could not keep them back from the aching and the longing of his heart.

"Tell me but one thing. You say you wore the mask of passion to fool them;—did you ever let another before me tell you of his passion thus?"

His own lips lingered in their kisses upon hers; she drew herself from his embrace with something of her old smile, of her old scorn.

"No. Or no prayer of yours should make me your wife."

"And then you ask me if my faith be perfect still! There are scores of women—women who would censure *you*—who think it no shame to bring tainted lips to their husbands."

"Well," she said, wearily, "give me not too much praise for being prouder, and it may be colder than many women

are! If I never bent to the follies of love, I was but the more blamable, perhaps, for using them without mercy to my own ends. I tell you I *never spared.* If any ever doubted or resisted me, he had a terrible chastisement; he soon gave his very soul and conscience up into my hands. Sometimes I think that Mephistopheles himself never tempted more deftly and more brutally than I have done. That dead Viana! He would be living now were it not for me. He was half a Bourbon in his creeds; he worshiped pleasure, and pleasure alone; revolutions might have reeled around him, and Carlo would never have laid down the wine-cup, never asked with what side the day went or the battle turned. But I brought him to give his very life to my moulding; I moved him to his own ruin by those very qualities of fearless chivalry and generous passion that should have been his shield from me. And—oh God!—if you had seen him lying dead there as I saw him, with his brave face turned upward, that he might smile in my eyes to the last!——"

Her head sank, there was the set mute anguish on her of a remorse that would never fade out while life remained. He stood beside her silent also; he knew that there were no words that could assuage this bitterness, he knew that to this self-condemnation justice forbade any consolation that must have been at its best but a deceiving sophistry.

"Yet you say your cause was noble?" he asked her, gently, at the last. "It was not to gain the cruel empty triumph of a woman's vanity that you beguiled them?"

"God knows! There was guilty triumph enough in me at times. In the main—yes—it was for the cause of freedom that I won them. *That* had been harmless; but *my* sin was that I made them stake their lives on me, yield their souls to me, surrender their consciences to me—because I taught them love, and then, when they were my slaves, I used them to their own destruction, as these charcoal-makers thrust the fresh wood in to burn and feed their fires."

"Still you believed that those fires were the sacrifice-fires of the people's altars of liberty?"

She shivered slightly in the ardent heat of the broad noonday.

"At first, with all the youth and passion of faith that were in me, I *did* believe it. And I clung to the belief long—long after I knew it had its root in quicksands. But after I had learned how hopeless the struggle for pure freedom is, after I had learned that the absolutisms of thrones and churches are masked batteries of iron and granite on to which the thinker and the poet and the patriot fling themselves in combat only to be crushed and perish; after I had learned that only one among ten thousand of those who had the welfare of the peoples on their lips had it also in their hearts, and that fraud, knavery, selfish greed, impatient discontent, corrupt ambitions, were the natures of the liberators not less than of the tyrants;—after I had read the bare truth to its last letter;—I lured them still. Partly because I was irrevocably bound to the work, partly because all my old belief would not die; chiefly of all, because I had grown to love the power possessed, and could not bring myself to lay it down and own my whole life a defeat. Nor was it one——"

The warmth flushed her face again, her eyes lit with the light of victory, something of the haughty defiance with which she had challenged Giulio Villaflor returned then as she challenged the memories of her past.

"It has been a crime, it may be—but not a failure. No Vassalis ever *failed*. I have fed hope into action, when without me it would have died out in darkness. I have armed hands that but for my weapons could never have struck their oppressors down. I have breathed liberty into a thousand lives that but for me might never have drawn in its mountain air. I have loosened the bonds of many martyrs; I have broken the chains of many captives —men who suffered agonies, here in this Italy, simply because they dared to cling to her, and seek vengeance for her violation. No. It has been no failure. Are we not victorious at the last, if the least thing for freedom have been wrought by us?"

She spoke not to him but to her Past, as though its remorse arraigned while yet its conquest crowned her. She pleaded with her own conscience; she raised her cause in justification against the witness of the years that were gone; she had been true—true to the death—to the

peoples of the earth and to their liberties, true to Truth through all.

It is a noble loyalty, one very rare amid mankind—one that surely may avail to atone for much.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"BY MORNING TOUCHED WITH AUREOLE LIGHT; BY SUNSET STRANDED."

THOSE words were the last on her lips for many moments. From the gloom and stillness of the hut, where there was a depth of shadow only broken by the green mosses that strewed the floor and the gray flash of a tame pigeon's wing guarding its brood in the farthest nook, she looked out at the luxuriance of color and the blaze of sun, while her thoughts were sunk into the past.

He did not break her musings; his own thoughts were filled with her history, of which he still knew, in truth, but so little, yet which seemed to him told wholly in those few brief sentences. Memories also came to him, revived by her relation—memories vague and fugitive, as of things scarcely heard before, because without interest at the time of their hearing, of stories that had floated to him in clubs and cafés in the cities of Europe, long ere he had met Idalia, of some beautiful Greek or Roumelian, of whom men told marvels, and about whose reputation had gathered many splendid idle romances, fabulous as they were contradictory—romances that gave a thousand magnificent impossible legends to the records of her life, but stole from her, as such romances ever will, all "the white flower of a blameless life," and made her pleasures as guilty, and her charms as resistless, as those of Lucrezia or Theodora. He had never heeded them in their telling; he had cared little for women, still less for the babble of slanders, and they had passed him without interest enough to linger on

his remembrance an hour But now, with the words of her story, they recurred to him as such forgotten things will. Not to sting him with doubts of her, with fear for himself—suspicion of her was a thing impossible to him—but to madden him with impatient longing to reach her calumniators and strike them down. His nature was too bold for slander to do more than rouse his passion against the slanderer, his chivalry for the slandered.

"They were all lies!" he muttered in his beard, his face flushing as those distant memories stole on him. "All lies!—where are the tellers of them?"

She started slightly, and her eyes came back from their dreaming speculation and dwelt on his.

"What were the lies?"

"Things that I heard of you—once. I remember now——"

"Ah!" A quick sigh escaped her—she would so gladly have kept her life fair and unshadowed in this man's sight at least. "Well, do not blame the tellers of them; my life laid me open to misconstruction; no one can complain, if their lives do so, of any calumny that may befall them."

Her voice was cold and careless; the evil of calumny had not power to wound, but it had had power to chill and harden her, and the venom had left its trail thus forever.

"But why——"

He paused, not willing even by a syllable to risk trenching on that silence which she thought it fittest to keep unbroken.

"Why did I so leave it open? For many things. First, ere I knew what calumny meant—when I was so young to the world that I yet believed I and Truth could avail to convince and to conquer it!—my name was stained too deeply, all undreamt of by me, for any future career, had it been pure as a child's, to wash the stain away. I was slandered—unjustly. Slandered, I say! It was a thousand times worse than that. A traitor took the blank page of my youth and wrote it over behind my back with infamous, indelible falsehood——"

A heavy curse broke asunder her words.

"Tell me who he was, and vengeance shall find him."

She passed her hand over his brow with a gentle caress.

"No. You shall have no darkness on you from my past of my bringing. But you do not fear to take to your heart a woman whom the world has called evil thus?"

"The world! What terrors do you think that liar has for me?"

She smiled—a smile in which there was as much of weariness as of sweetness.

"It is not always a liar; it was not so always in what it said of me. But we will leave that! To-day is our own; we will not poison it. You think we may make our way to the sea to-night?"

"I do. There is little to be feared in the open country—almost nothing from the peasantry. The horses will be fresh, and if we can reach the little fishing village nearest to Antina, I could send some barcarolo to bring in my yacht. No suspicion falls on the vessel; the soldiers I saw at your villa did not know me, and no one will hear anything from Nicolò. We have only to fear the sbirri——"

"Wait; tell me all. How was it you heard of my arrest? How was it you found me?"

He told her; and she listened in the soft lull of the noon silence, in the leafy twilight of the forest hut, to the story of his search for her—listened with an exceeding tenderness on the face, whose careless pride so often had smiled contemptuously on all love and all despair. He told it in very few words, lessening as much as was possible all pain he had endured, all difficulty he had conquered, lest he should seem to press a debt upon her in the recital. But the very brevity, the very generosity, touched her as no eloquence would have done. By the very omissions she knew how stanch had been this endurance, how devoted this fidelity, which through good and evil report had cleaved to her, and fought their way to her.

"My love, my love," she murmured, as she stooped to him, staying his last words. "Oh, that I might repay you in the future. If I were only sure that I should bring you no misery—if I could only know that no evil from me would fall on you—if I could only feel there were nothing untold between us, and that my life were worthier of your

noble loyalty—I would lose every coin and rood of my inheritance, and come to you beggared of everything, yet rich, my God! how richer far than now."

He had never seen her dignity so utterly abased, her pride so utterly swept away as now, when those broken and longing utterances escaped her; he saw that memories, which were in that moment an agony, shook down all the strength and all the calmness of her nature.

"Listen," he said, softly and gravely, while he drew her hands in his. "Beggared or crowned, you would alike be my mistress, my empress, my idol. Slandered or honored, you will alike be the one glory of my life, the one thought in my death. Why let us speak as if we should ever part? You must slay me, or forsake me, ere ever we shall be divided now."

Her mouth quivered, her eyes filled, as she heard him; slowly, and in silence, she stooped and let her lips rest on his.

For some moments she answered him in no other way than by that one touch of her caress; then, with one of the swift transitions of her changeful temperament, she looked down on him with a smile in which all her most seductive sweetness gleamed, as the gold rays of the southern day flashed in the dark lustrous languor of her regard.

"*Anima mia*," she murmured, caressingly, "we will believe so, at least while we can, even—even if you should live to curse me, and I should live for Monsignore Villaflor's vengeance! Let us dream of a Future, then. I have so long thought of the world's future only, and so long not dared to give a glance at my own! Let us dream while we can. Tell me of your old Border castle? We will raise it from its ashes once more if you will. And you shall come and be lord of my great Roumelian fief, all its hills, and its plains, and its rivers, and its vast solitudes with their terrible beauty, and its fortress that is a palace, like some Persian vision of the night that we see when we have fallen asleep in reading Firdursi. Ah! there is a life there possible, if we could but reach it—a life fit for your bold chieftainship, a life that might redeem my past. We both know the world to weariness. There, eastward, you and I—we might find something at least of the old

ideals of my early fancies; there are a people sunk in sloth and barbarism, there are the domains of a prince, there are grand woods and waters, and mountains to be piled between us and the world, there is human soil barren of every good thing, uncultured, useless, needing the commonest tillage. I should be free there, and you would be a king in your own right. It needs just such a sovereign as you would be, my brave, dauntless, lion-hearted wanderer! We might be happy? We might reach still more yet than merely happiness?"

And they dreamed of the Future, while the brilliant day stole onward, and the stillness of intense heat brooded over the sun-lighted earth; the Future that to him was a treasury of joys so passionate, so measureless, so incredible that they seemed passing all hope, escaping all reach; the Future that to her was in its fairest vision but as a mirage of that lost land of peace and liberty which her own act had forfeited forever.

The day declined from its noon height, and neither knew nor asked how the hours were numbered.

When the sun was touching the lowest cloud, and the amber glow was burning into scarlet, he started to his feet; he remembered that the forester would be coming homeward, and that with evening their flight must begin. As they left the cabin, Idalia looked round it with a long and wistful glance; the day would be dear in her memory beyond all others, and in her own heart she believed that it was the last they should ever pass together. Then she lifted one of the rude wooden bowls to him with her old half-tender, half-coquette smile.

"The child is not here; put some coins in for us both. You must give me your gold to-day; if ever we are free, you shall be lord of all I own. Ah! you only care to be lord of myself? Do you think that I do not know that? But *I* shall care to crown you and give you such purples as I have. You are royal to the very core of your fearless, kingly heart; and you shall reign over my kingdom, such as it is, if ever we can reach it."

They went out into the stillness of the forest, so still that they might have been alone in an unpeopled world. Here and there through the network of branches the flushed sky

glowed, vivid as fire; darkness already had fallen on the slopes of the hills, behind which the sun had sunk down; on the foam of the waters opposite gleams and breadths of prismatic color still sparkled; the evening air was heavy with fragrance, and under the foliage the luciole began to glimmer. Erceldoune went toward the grazing horses, tethered in camp-fashion by a long heel-rope, beneath the cedars; she followed him, stroking the neck of the brave sorrel that had borne her with such unflagging speed through the whole of the past night.

"Carry me as bravely again, *caro*," she murmured him, drawing the silken mane through her hand. "Take me to freedom, and you shall have such pathless meadows of wild grass to wander in, eastward, at your will!—no curb shall ever touch you, no spur shall ever gall you!"

As she caressed the hunter, the hound at her side dropped his muzzle earthward with a low smothered growl, then lifted his head, and looked at her with anxious, eager questions in his imploring eyes.

"The dog scents some danger. What is it, Sulla?" she asked, giving him that sign of silence which the animal had learned so well.

"A wolf, may be. We will unearth him if he be anything worse," said Erceldoune, as he swept back with one arm the heavy boughs, while with his right hand he loosened the pistol from his sash. The rocks sloped sharply down; the sunset light shone on the dell beneath as he leant forward.

A cry broke from him, loud, wild, exultant as the cry of the eagle swooping to its prey. With one hand still holding upward the matted veil of foliage, he stood rooted there, all the worst passions of his nature roused in an instant into deadliest strength.

There, almost at his feet, far beneath in the curved hollow of a moss-grown, cup-shaped dell, sleeping as he himself had slept on the Capriote shore at his foe's mercy, with one arm beneath his head and the other flung idly outward, in the loose linen dress of an Italian melon-seller, lay the Greek, Conrad Phaulcon.

He motioned her to him with a gesture that let the leaves fall for an instant back into their places; his teeth

were clinched, his words hissed broken through them, his eyes were alight with the blood-thirst of desert animals.

"Look—look!" he gasped. "There—at last—there in my power—the brute who shot me down——"

He swept the boughs backward and upward once more with the dash of his arm, and she bent to look through the twilight of the leaves; her face changed to the whiteness of death as her eyes fell on the upturned face of the sleeping man, her lips drew their breath gaspingly; a shiver of unutterable horror ran through her.

"He!—he!"

That one word seemed all her voice could whisper, and in it a whole world of agony, loathing, remorse, hatred, and shame unbearable seemed told.

Erceldoune, with the lifted boughs still held above their heads, stood and gazed at her in a horror scarce less than that with which the sight of the slumbering Greek had stirred her.

"*You* know him!"

She seized his wrist, and, with the convulsive force that comes to the most delicate women in their hours of extremity, shook his grasp from the arm of the tree, whose foliage fell once more between them and the sight of that bright Athenian beauty that lay there in the careless rest of some sculpture of Lykegênes.

"Know him!—oh, my God! Do I know him?"

"Ay! Do *you* know the man who sought to murder me?"

There was the first sternness of waking fury, the first unconscious violence of stealing doubt, in the question as it broke from him, while he vainly sought to wrench his wrists from the close grasp she held them in, and be free to fall upon his enemy as lions fall on their foes. With them her courage returned, her self-command came back to her, though her face was bloodless still, and a terrible anguish was set on it; she looked him full in the eyes—eyes for the first time bent on her with the searching severity of an accuser.

"Yes. I know him. I did *not* know that he was your assassin, though—though—I grant I feared it."

"Feared it! What is he to you?"

She was silent.

"What is he to you—this brigand, this brute, this vilest of the vile scum of Europe?"

He spoke with the imperious vehemence of the intolerable horror that possessed him. She was silent still; over her face a hot flush came and went, the flush of an intense humiliation.

"What do you know of him? Answer me, before I wring it out of his throat."

She shuddered where she stood; but, with a strength scarce less than his own, she held him from the place where the Greek slept, and drew him by sheer force farther and farther outward.

"Let him be. He has been the curse of my fate; he will be the curse of yours."

"By heaven, never! I will stamp his life out where he lies. Let me go—let me go."

"Go for what?"

"To deal with him—justly."

"Justly!"

"Yes. Men kill murderers; and it was through no lack of will in him he was not one. I will not kill him sleeping, but I will wash my wrongs out once for all. Let me go!"

She flung her arms close around him, so that he must have wrenched her beautiful limbs asunder before he could have left her; she drew him backward and backward, her breath against his cheek, her hair showered on his breast, her dignity broken, her self-control forgot, vivid emotion, agonized abandonment, making her a hundredfold more resistless in that hour than she had ever been in her proudest moments of supremacy. She knew her power; under that embrace he stood subdued, irresolute, remembering nothing except the loveliness he looked on.

"Is that your love? Is that your trust?"

She felt a tremor run through all his frame—the tremor of the blind rage against his foe, of the blind idolatry of her, that warred within him.

"I break neither, because I will deal with my assassin! What is he to you that you should shield him?"

The first taint of jealousy ran through the words. The

tremor of shame that he had seen when her glance first fell upon the Greek passed over her; yet her gaze met his, and never sank beneath it.

"I cannot tell you."

There was an accent of hatred deep as his own in the low words; he looked with a terrible eagerness into her eyes.

"*Cannot!* Wait. You say you never loved; were you never wedded where you hate?"

"Never."

"Then what *is* this villain to you?"

She seemed to shrink and shiver where his arms held her, as though his words stabbed her through and through. She held silence still.

"Tell me," he swore to her, "or, as he lives, that tiger *shall*, with my shot through his brain to pay for the confession!"

"Hush, hush! If he wakes, we are lost!"

"I will wake him in such fashion that he never wakes again! My assassin *your* care? Let me go—let me go, I tell you!"

He strove to put her arms from him, to fling off him the coil of her hair, to break from the paralyzing spell of her beauty; but she would not loosen him, she would not be shaken off—she drew him farther and farther from the Greek, let him seek as he would to escape from her.

"Oh, my beloved—my beloved! where is the faith you promised me? One trial—and it breaks! With such a life as mine, do you not know that there must be far darker things than this to try you? Have you not said that you will cleave to me through all? Have you not refused to believe even my own word against me?"

"God knows it, yes! But——"

"Here is the first test, then; were your oaths empty words?"

He was silent; he stood motionless and unnerved under the brief touch of the rebuke. She knew that she had bound him in those withes of honor that he would never break; and she knew that she had touched him in the one noble weakness that laid him utterly at her will and mercy. She loosened her arms from him; she stood apart and left him free.

"Go, if you will. Doubt me, if you will. Avenge your wrong, if you will. But—if you do, we never meet again."

His lips parted, without sound; an anguish of appeal looked at her from his eyes; he stood consumed by the passions of his hate and of his love, that strove with one another in a deadly conflict.

"Choose," she said, simply—and waited.

His chest heaved with a mighty sigh.

"Great Heaven! You ask me to spare him after such a crime!"

"I ask you nothing. Take your vengeance, it is your right; but you will never look upon my face again."

"Because I am his foe?"

"No! Because you doubt me."

With that one word she pierced him to the quick.

He had no strength, no memory, no thought, save of her and of her will; he looked back once to where his slumbering traitor lay, with the mad longing of denied vengeance in the look, then slowly, and with his head bent, he turned away.

"Be it as you will. I yield you to-day more than my life itself."

And as she heard, all her coldness and her imperious resolve died out, as though they had not been; she sank into his outstretched arms, and wept as she had never done in all her haughty womanhood—wept uncontrollably, agonizedly, in such abandonment, in such weakness, as the sovereign temper in her never, ere then, had known.

At sight of that passionate grief he forgot his own wrong, his own doubt, his very vengeance; he remembered nothing, except that the woman for whom he would have laid down his life suffered thus, while to her suffering he could bring no more consolation than though he stood a stranger before her. It was not in him to have one thought of his own cause of hatred against this man, when once he saw that she endured this poignant and deadly pain through his assassin, this unutterable misery at sight of the sleeping Greek, whose face turned upward, with the sunset warmth and flickering shadow of the leaves playing on it, thus had broken all their dreams of the future, all the sweetness of their solitude.

She lay passive some moments in his arms, her whole frame shaken by convulsive, tearless sobs.

"Oh God!" she moaned. "And I dreamt of a Future, while *he* was living there!"

A darkness like night swept over her lover's face; the evil spirit was upon him, which in the midnight chase through the moonlight of the Bosphorus shore had been on him, thirsting for his enemy's blood. He stooped his head over her, and his whisper was terribly brief:

"Let me go, and he will not be living long."

He had surrendered to her; he had yielded up to her this vengeance, which had been the one goal of such ceaseless search, such vain desire; but though he had let her for awhile hold his hands from it, his whole heart, and soul, and passions were in tempestuous rebellion still; his blood was hot for war, his conscience was strangled by hatred.

"Let me go," he whispered, thirstily. "You shall see him lie dead at your feet—dead, like the brave horse that rotted to carrion through him."

She shivered, as though an ice-cold wind had passed over her; but danger had been too long her atmosphere, and the tempests of men's hearts too long the powers by which she swayed them, not to nerve her to force and calmness when both were needed. She was deathly pale, except for those flushes of shame that had made the blood rush backward to her veins; but she spoke tranquilly, laying her hand upon his mouth, and with that command which never, in moments of need, deserted her.

"Peace! Those are not like yourself—those tiger instincts. Leave them to him; they are beneath you."

"They are not! They are my right."

"Is revenge ever a right?"

"We deemed it so in old Scotland. A right divine!"

His face was stern and evil still, with the storm of his longing wrath, with the pent tide of his loosening jealousy.

"Divine? Devilish! Right or wrong, lay it down for my bidding."

He was silent. Under her hands she felt the muscles of his arm thrill and swell, against her breast she felt the stifled panting of his breath. To hold him back, was like holding in leash a gazehound when it sees the stag.

"Lay it down, or you are man-sworn, and forsworn. You talk of your ancient Scotland, how did she hold *that* dishonor?"

She spoke with a vivid intensity in the words, that left her clinched teeth so low, so slowly; she knew every chord in the nature of this man, as fine artists know every chord in the diapason of the instrument that echoes and vibrates to their slightest touch.

He held his peace; he would not break his word to her—break his word to a woman, and that woman defenseless, and his mistress, and his life's pledged law; but his hunger of desire was terrible to fall on that sleeping panther lying so near, and to deal on him ten thousand blows—blows for his own wrong at his assassin's score, but blows a hundred times more strong because his foe was known and shielded by Idalia.

She saw the struggle in him, and her heart went out to him in it—went out to the strength and the weakness that were so blent in it, the strength of honor and the weakness of passion. How often she had seen these two antagonists strive against each other to hold and to keep a man's soul!

"Oh, my love!" she murmured, as she drew him farther and farther from the place where his foe slept. "Give me this one thing, and you shall have all my love. Let him be—let him be. He took all; he shall not take you. Come, come, come!"

He held back still, while still her arms clung to him, and drew him onward and onward to leave his murderer in peace.

"One word only," he muttered, close in her ear, while his lips, as they brushed her throat, scorched it like fire. "You deny me my vengeance. Is it for love of *me*—or pity of *him*?"

The eyes that he could have sworn were true, as he would have sworn that the stars shone above them, looked up long into his; there was a depth of anguish in them that smote and stilled his passions as with a sudden awe.

"*Both.* I love you, as I never thought in me to love the living or the dead; and I pity him, as the longest, the latest, the most wretched of all my enemies, though they are many as the sands of the sea. Have I answered you now? Come!"

The intonation of the words, rather than their meaning, laid their own solemnity on him; he read that in her eyes, before which his own wrongs seemed to dwarf, and pale, and die out.

"Do with me as you will," he said to her, while his head sank and a great sigh escaped him. "I cannot reach you —in all things—but I will follow as best I may."

She seemed to him so far above him with her royal past, that had given her the sway as the woes of royalties, with this lofty serene generosity from which she looked with compassion on one whom she declared the greatest enemy of her life. She started as if the homage stung her like an adder—as if the reverence of his words were some unbearable shame.

"Never say that! Never—never. Follow me in nothing. Teach me your own brave, straight, knightly creeds. Let me see your noble honesty of thought and purpose, and let me steep myself in truth, and have it cleanse me if I can! Ah! once before we go, let me hear you say that you forgive me. Forgive me all you know—forgive me all that is hidden from you!"

The remorse with which, in the dawn of that day, she had bidden him flee from her forever, the abasement that had broken down her dignity, and laid her subject before him, were tenfold intensified now—intensified to a burning misery of grief before him, to a humiliation that crushed down like a bent reed the bold spirit that had never quailed before the threats of the Roman tyrant, or the uplifted rods of his scourgers. She seemed broken by an unutterable contrition; stricken before him by the conscious guilt of a criminal before her judge; the prayer for pardon seemed to pierce her lips before she knew that she uttered it, the thirst for his mercy seemed to be intense as if the crime against his life had been woven by her brain, and instigated by her will, although the hand of the Greek, sleeping unconscious in the hollowed cleft of rock below, had been her tool and servant.

There was not one pause of doubt, one hesitation of dread, in the answer that rose from the grandest generosity in his nature, and came to her with a gentleness, grave and infinitely sad, that seemed upon her ear like the fall of some divine music.

"Forgive! That is no word between you and me Yet, —if there be anything of pardon needed from my life to yours in past, or present, or future, I give the pardon now, once and forever; you cannot stretch it farther than my love will yield it."

She heard, and her haughty head sank downward, till her lips touched his hand in the sign of homage and allegiance that she had refused to the claim of monarchs. Her eyes were blind with tears, her heart was filled with a despair bitter as death, with a sweetness sweet as life; he was at once her slave and her ruler, her judge and her savior.

"Ah, God!" she said, in her soul. "How vainly I sought for a great nature where great things dwelt, and great ambitions governed! I never found it till now; and now—how little it knows itself as great!"

Without a word he loosed her from his arms, as though by that abstinence from any utterance or caress of passion to show that no mere passion goaded him to the forgiveness which a higher and purer tenderness bestowed, and would so bestow through the uttermost ordeal, and up to the last hour. Silently he led the horses from the place, their hoofs noiselessly sinking in the rank deep grass, drew the girths closer, and made the few preparations that were needed for their night-ride to the sea; and below, far down under the cedar shelter, where the sun-rays never strayed, the Athenian lay, sunk in the dreamless sleep of a profound exhaustion, a fatigue careless where it dropped down to rest so that it might lie on unawakened, undisturbed.

His foe was left in peace; a heavier surrender to her than any that had ever been made, many and wide and weighty though they were, the sacrifices that she had wooed, or commanded from those who had no law save only the bidding of her lips. His heart was sick within him; every vein was on fire with the lion's longing for the lion's spring. The old religion of revenge, which had been sacred to his forefathers in the age when murderers were proven by bier-right, and for wrong the flaming cross of war was borne alight over moor and mountain, was in many a moment his religion still; it was "wild justice" in his eyes, and a justice best meted out from foe to foe without the judgment of any

alien voice. To turn away and leave his enemy unaroused; to skulk and flee as though he were the evil-doer; to let the murderer lie there unawakened, unarraigned, instead of forcing him from slumber to answer for his guilt with life, —a deadlier thing she could not have demanded at his hands.

The sweetness of the day had died with the setting of the sun, and the darkness of night had fallen on their lives as on the earth where they dwelt. Silently they mounted, silently they passed away, the tramping of feet lost on the yielding moss, on the thick herbage; silently they turned and looked backward with a long and lingering gaze at the forest roof which well might prove their last refuge together, the last shelter in which they should ever dream of freedom and of a future. Then through the first shadows of evening, under the deep gloom of the woods, beside the melancholy moaning of the hidden river channels, they went onward to their flight from Church and King, onward to the sea, if they could ever reach the sweet fresh liberty of its wide waters.

And as they went—where the leafy depths inclosed, and the forest twilight hid them—the Greek rose slowly, with the heavy lethargy of sleep, and the staggering weakness of overwrought fatigue still on him, like some fierce yet timorous panther that has been roused from rest to a craven dread and a longing for slaughter both in one. Through his sleep words had come to him, mingling with his dreams; instincts had stirred in him while yet the weight of that deathlike slumber had laid like lead on his eyelids; a voice had roused the dormant images of memory; a sense of some presence, some peril, some rising of hate and of fear, had come on him ere he had been sensible; he had shaken the clinging stupor from him with supreme effort; he had glanced upward through the boughs of cedar; he had made one eager, springing movement like a panther, with the panther's lust in his eyes, and a thousand warring passions at his heart;—then the craft of his nature, the cowardice of his nation, conquered the bolder and more ferocious impulse, as well as the jealous, wayward, tyrannous affection that still, with all his vice, lived in him; the dread of his antagonist was blent with the instinct of his blood

toward treachery in the place of defiance. He feigned sleep afresh, lying as though still in the profound peace of that dreaming rest; lying so with the soft brown lashes on his cheek, and his head idly thrown back upon his arm, until the hoofs of the horses had ceased to crush the cyclomen and hellebore, and the screen of forest foliage had fallen between him and the man he hated with the reckless bitterness of the injurer to the injured, the woman whom he loved despite all, though he adored tyranny and evil, and gold and selfish gains, and the brutal exercise of a pitiless jealousy, far more.

Then, as they passed away, he staggered to his feet, and stood a moment, in the red after-glow that streamed upon him, erect, quivering, instinct with passion, like some lithe, beautiful, murderous forest beast, the hot and ruddy light burning in the glow of his eyes, and cast luridly on the spirited head and perfect form that were graceful and splendid as the legendary beauty of Arinthœus.

"*She* can love? The world should end to-night!"

The words broke from him where he stood alone. All through the years since first he had won into his toils the young sovereign of the Vassalis dominion, the heir of the great dead Julian, the dreamer of dreams so grand, so pure, so impossible in their sublime ambitions, that their very greatness had been made the element of her own destruction, he had never known love in its faintest touch pass over her proud heart; merciless in awaking passion, no stroke of it had ever recoiled upon her; with the power of the sorceress she had had also the sorceress's immunity from the danger of the spells by which she wrought; many had thought that they had gained their entrance to her heart—many had thought so when so she chose to dupe them—but all had found, too late, that there was no essay more hopeless than to seek to stir to tenderness the haughty coldness and carelessness of her strength, to seek to waken one echo of fondness from the superb negligence and levity of her ironic scorn. He had never known her love even once roused; he had sworn that, if ever that passion touched her, he to whom it were given should yield up as his price no less coin than life.

CHAPTER XXIX.

BESIDE THE SEA.

By dawn they had reached the shore, having bent far northward of where Naples lay, and so round to the sea.

Here the worn-out horses, fasting and drenched with steam, and quivering with fatigue at the close of a second night of that breathless race, staggered, trembling under the great shadow of a mighty wall of cliff that rose sheer upward from the breadth of smooth and yellow sand, its sides jagged and honeycombed, its crest overhung with festoons of wild vine, and crowned with the gray plumes of olive, the waters idly lapping the amber beach below, and stretching league on league outward till the dim sea-line and the mist-laden skies of morning blent in one. Involuntarily she stretched her hands out to it in welcome and in prayer, as though the Sea-born of her fathers lived and heard.

"Oh waters! give me your liberty."

They looked so wide, so cool, so deeply still, stretching out in their measureless freedom to the infinite.

"It is gentler than earth," she muttered. "Men die hardly on the bitterness of the land—the land which devours them that she may blossom and laugh with fruits born of corruption!—but the very death that the sea gives is dreamy and tranquil. And the sea will not render its dead, but loves them, and lulls them, and holds them ever with their stories untold! Where is there any other thing so merciful as that?"

There was the longing of a melancholy, weary to despair, through the poet-like thought of the murmured words; in that moment she would gladly have sought the unbroken rest that could alone be found in the deep sea-bed, beneath those fathomless and changeless waves.

She sank down on a broken pile of rock, with the ribbed

sand at her feet, and the bulwark of the mighty cliff rising above; her face was colorless, haggard, almost stern, as though there were set on it such hatred of herself that all its youth and brilliancy changed to one bitter heart-sick scorn; her hair was thrust back off her brow; her eyes looked with a tearless, thirsty longing over the waters. There had been silence between them well-nigh through all the hours of that night-ride to the sea; there was silence still; he stood beside her with the darkness of her thoughts flung back on his, with the tempestuous passions that he had choked down at her will burning and aching in him still.

"You are certain?" she said, suddenly, at last.

A heavier darkness came upon his face.

"Do you think men forget their murderers?"

Her teeth clinched on one another, as though to grind the starting words to silence; she laughed slightly—a laugh that sent a shudder through his blood.

"Well—your murderer was the man that had the hewing and the shaping of my life. Do you wonder *now* that it was evil?"

"Of yours? Oh God!"

She laughed still faintly; that laugh that has a misery which never yet lay in tears.

"A fair comrade!—a noble tutor! What think you? A lofty close for my imperial ambitions, is it not? A priest's cell my prison-house, a criminal's flight my safety, a thief and an assassin my associate, my——"

Her teeth closed once more, shutting in the word that would have escaped them; a shiver of agony shook him as he heard; his breath came in slow stifled gasps; he had thought that he could never suffer, once knowing that her love was his, once having felt her lips upon his own, yet he suffered now as he had never done in all the years of his life.

"Twice you have checked my vengeance, and bidden me 'spare'!" he muttered, in the fierceness of a torture that made his words almost savage. "If these brutes *be* your foes, why call me off their throats?"

"A lion shall not choke snakes," she said, briefly.

The brevity gave the deeper meaning to the words.

"Why speak in parables? You must know——"

"That your faith is dying? Well, let it die. It has every right. *I* will not reproach you!"

The bitter despairing hatred softened from her features, and the sweeter sadness, that grieved less for herself than him, followed it once more. His eyes turned on her, filled with hot cruel tears.

"It will never die. But—why should you wring my heart to test it?"

"Test it! Ah! do not wrong me like that! Do you think I would cause you an instant's pain that was in my power to spare? Do you think I would spend a woman's miserable chicaneries and heartless vanities on you, or triumph in them at your cost?"

Her voice had changed to intense appeal, to vivid emotion, and she held his hands close against her heart, looking upward at him with a longing that broke down all her courage and her pride—the longing that he, at least, should know that she was true to him, though she must withhold him from his justice, and deny him all he had a title to hear.

"Answer me!" she pursued, while her eyes gazed into his. "Be my law, my conscience—I have been steeped so long in evil, I have lost all fitness to judge honor or dishonor aright! To tell you all, to lay my life before you as it should be laid, I must break my oath, I must belie my word, I must be false to the chief thing that has ever redeemed my past. Answer me—shall I do it?"

She saw a tremor shake him as a great storm shakes the rooted strength of cedars; his head sank, his mouth quivered; a fierce and cruel conflict was waged in him. For awhile he hesitated; torn by a deadly anguish of desire to speak the word that should unloose the bonds of silence between them.

Then a brave gentleman's inborn instincts conquered him, and spoke in his answer:

"No. Be true to yourself, and you will never be false to me. For the rest, you know me. I can wait."

And she who heard him knew that with that refusal he had put from him what cost him more in the renunciation than scepters laid aside have cost to those who put them

by at the dictation of a pure and generous honor beyond all selfish sway, as his was now beyond it.

"You are great beyond men's nobility," she said, briefly. In that momentary weakness she had longed that he should bid her sacrifice her word and her bond to him, but he was far higher and dearer in her sight because he denied that weakness its way; she had much strength herself, and she loved such strength in men. "But—but—have you no fear when I tell you my life has been tainted by such as he?"

The red blood rushed over his forehead, his teeth crushed in a mighty curse.

"I have but the fear that, if I look ever on his face again, I shall turn murderer like him."

A sickening shudder passed over her.

"Nay! why not revenge yourself on me? I was his associate. How can you know I was not his accomplice?"

"*How!* Have I not looked into your eyes?"

The infinite trust and tenderness that the reply breathed was rather in the tone than in the words.

"My eyes! What do a woman's eyes ever do but lie? And yet look, look forever, if you will, so that you learn from them that my heart is truth, but that my past is shame!"

Her head sunk, her gaze was fastened on the ebbing sea with an intense despair, her courage was broken and abased at last.

He stood beside her, silent; his faith would not leave nor his love forsake her, but the abyss of a heavy guilt yawned between them, the barrier of a pitiless silence severed them. The words of the Holy Mother of Monastica came back upon his memory:

"Take to your bosom that flower alone which lives in the fullness of light, and folds no leaves unopened from your gaze."

But passion and faith were strong in him; stronger than wisdom, stronger than vengeance. He stooped and laid his lips upon her brow.

"The shadow of others' shame may darken you; no shame of yours is on you. Whatsoever you are—be mine!"

The sea stretched outward, league on league of still gray water, with no color on it in the young hours of the dawn,

no life, save the movement here and there of some awakening ocean bird. The cliffs, tawny and water-stained and sun-browned, rose aloft, curving inward, and shaping one of the many indents of the irregular southern coast; mighty shafts of stone that seemed to touch the skies, and were deeply riven here and there in fissures filled with the clinging of the vine. Grand, solitary, wild, there was no human aid, no boat's help to be looked for here.

The sea lay there, but between them and liberty it stretched, an inexorable desert, impassable, and giving no freedom except death.

"Moments are years; we cannot waste them," he muttered, as he looked across the waters, where no sail broke the space, and upward at the rocks which frowned, sterile and lonely, locking in the breadth of ribbed beach-sand. "A fisher-boat, sea-worthy, might save us still. I know a village that should lie not far from this. A cluster of fishing-cabins——"

"Yes, there is one. Let me think."

She paused awhile, seeking in half-forgotten memories for all her knowledge of the coast.

"Yes, a mile northward of us. A few huts under the cliff, and men with the sea's strength in them when once they are afloat. Go you to them; they may surely have a felucca that could cross that motionless sea."

"Go! And leave you?"

"Else we must perish together. There is no help here."

"Better that!"

"No; you shall not die by Bourbon steel for me. I am known well in the country; the story of my arrest must be common to all now. This mask-dress, which is all they left me, would draw curiosity at once. You look like a marinaro; you can hire the boat unsuspected, you can steer here, and, once here, with our pistols at their foreheads we can make the sailors take what way we will. Go. I shall fire if any danger come. You will hear the shot far in this still air."

"Is there no other way?"

"None. Leave me—there is no fear. And, in truth, I could not move farther yet. I am worn out at last."

She spoke faintly, wearily, and a gray death-like hue had stolen over all her face, where she leaned, her head upon

her arm, her eyes lusterless, and with their lids heavily drooped, looking outward at the sea, whose grave she coveted. The fearlessness that had challenged death; the force that had endured any torture rather than purchase peace and liberty by the betrayal of comrades; the high and dauntless spirit that had laughed at danger, and loved peril for its very hazard's sake,—these, which would never have yielded to any tyranny, or pang, or jeopardy that could have tried them, were unstrung and crushed by the horror which had possessed her from the first moment that she had seen the sleeping Greek and heard his crime—his craven sin of craft and slaughter. Humiliation rested on her; the deadliest suffering such a nature as hers can ever know—a thing which, until the sun had set in the past day, had never touched her temper. A shame that was ineffaceable seemed to her burnt into her life forever, and under it a strength which had never succumbed, a dignity which had never blenched or quailed before the sternest trials, surrendered at last. She had had the fortitude of men, the fearlessness of soldiers, but they seemed for the hour at least to die out in her now.

He looked at her, and he saw that the privations of her prison, the scant food of many days, the high-strung tension, and the exhausting exertions of the long and breathless ride, had told heavily upon her; and he who would have coined his very life to purchase aid for her, could do no more for her than the flock of monacci that flew past them with the breaking of the morning light.

He struck his heel into the sand with an agony of powerless grief.

"Great God! you will perish here of hunger, of thirst, of sunstroke, of misery! We were better in a desert than thus. I will go. I will bring help, if there be help on earth."

He went down the low strip of sanded shore, under the beetling shadow of the cliffs, northward to the fishing village on the edge of the waters, with low rounded cabin-roofs that were like clustered brown bee-hives beneath the giant shadow of the rocks. The wall of stone that shelved so high upward into the earth-hovering clouds screened him from view; the hamlet was a mile or more along the

coast; she was alone, with the hound at her feet, the loaded weapon in her hand, the glistening sea ebbing away into the distance where her eyes were fixed.

She sat motionless, while the noise of his footfall on the wet sands died gradually away. She listened to it till its last faint sound.

"Ah! if only for his sake he could pass out from my life forever," she murmured. "Either way I must sin to him; —kill him by forsaking him, or betray him by wedding with him. To go to his heart with such dishonor as *that* untold——"

She could have wished that the stroke of the red sun, rising stormily eastward, could reach and still her life, that the gray waves rolling slowly one on another to her feet could come to her and wash her down into their darkness. For she felt tainted with an assassin's craven crime; she felt driven into a traitor's guilt of secrecy and shame. She laughed a little, with the unutterable weariness of futile pain, with the ironic temper which had so long made jest of every suffering, that it scarce now spared her own.

"I know now what sort of despair fills monasteries and makes saints!" she thought. "How honorable to Deity, to give him the flotsam and jetsam of a wrecked existence!"

Twelve hours before she had said, and said truly, that no Vassalis ever failed; she had known that her life had been great in much even while blamable, it might be, in more; she had spoken of a future, in which much of dominion, of magnificence, of a pure and noble ambition would still linger—a future in the glow of eastern suns, in the lands of her inheritance, in the sovereignty of a chieftainship, where boundless evil remained to be conquered, and boundless liberty to be enjoyed—a future in consonance with the hatred of all bondage and the genius to rule, that were inborn in her. Yet now—now, since she had stooped down and seen the ruddy after-light upon the face of the slumbering Athenian—an endless night seemed to have fallen on her, and every dream of future and of freedom to be mockery.

Through the silence of the quiet dawn she sat without any movement; her hand closed on the butt of the pistol, and its mouth toward the sand; the half dead horses had

staggered under the shadow of the cliff, and were feebly trying to find food from the sea-salted grasses and drink from the brackish pools; there was no sound, except the monotonous chiming of the Mediterranean at her feet, no refuge in the hard and barren surface of the colossal sea-wall. She had sent him from her, chiefly for his sake, that he should not wait beside her till he was netted by the Church's webs, or slaughtered by the monarchist's steel, and an unutterable loneliness was about her; there seemed no mercy on the face of the waters, but only a cold and dreary smile. Beyond them lay liberty; but she felt as though even the force to arise and seek it had been killed in her.

Time passed in slow, sickening measure; the sullen light of a tempestuous morning burned higher in the heavens; full day was come; the couchant hound awoke with menace in his eyes; across the sands at her feet a shadow fell: there was no sound, no word, but she felt the presence, as men feel the gliding abhorred presence of a snake, the stealing velvet-footed approach of a tiger, ere they knew that either are near. She started, and rose to her feet, and fell slowly backward step by step, till she rested against the wall of cliff, her gaze in the fascination of horror fastened on Conrad Phaulcon as he stood, with the crimson sun in his face, and the gray water lying in a lonely waste behind him, his contadino's dress disordered, his forehead darkly flushed, his mouth working as the words halted in their furious utterance:

"Ho Miladi! others can ride a wild ride besides your lover and you. I have been on your track all the night through; I have scotched you at last. Where is he?—where? Answer me, or——"

She threw up her hands with a grand gesture of silence, that even in that moment cursed him:

"Hush! Never dare breathe his name!—*you*, his robber, his assassin."

The Greek's lips paled and shook.

"Robber! Assassin! Strange words to me."

The fire of his wrath was bated an instant before the resurrection of the crime he had deemed buried beneath the solitary shadows of the Carpathian pine-woods.

"Would that they *were* strange to you! Why did you swear falsely? I knew that coward sin had your hand in it, and you swore by the only memory you have ever reverenced that you were innocent. I believed you—I was fool enough for that!—because, though treachery was your native air, you still at your worst had never taken perjured oath by that one name."

She spoke slowly, wearily, with an unutterable reproach and bitterness in the quiet words; under them he was for the moment cowed; he shook slightly through all the splendor of his limbs, and his teeth gnawed the gold curls of his beard.

"It was for what you worship—Liberty!" he stammered, with a sullen shame.

"Liberty! No marvel that the peoples are in chains if the apostles of their freedom think to serve them thus!"

The words echoed over the stillness of the gray and tranquil seas with a profound eternal pathos; it was the sigh of the Girondists, when through the death-mists of the scaffold they saw the angel of freedom they had dreamed of changed into a vampire of blood.

The man before her, the lover who had left her, were alike forgot; in that moment her heart was with the nations of the earth, the blind who find but the blind to lead them when they escape the iron heel to track them down; the vast sum of suffering and heart-sick humanity that has no choice betwixt those who leave it to perish in its slough, or beat it forth to rot on battle-fields, and those who fill its parching throat with the fetid water of distorted truths, and fool its patient ignorance with lying grossness, that by it they may force upward into power.

First—beyond all, grief for them was with her; for those innumerable, uncounted, uncompassionated millions who are the prey alike of despot and of demagogue; by each alike condemned to be the long, unnoted, pitilessly consumed coil of fuse, lit and burnt out, to bear the flame by which ambition may show red against the skies, or to carry incendiarism in a conqueror's van. This reigned with her beyond all things; had so reigned ever, and would reign until her grave; this impersonal love, this infinite pity for the concrete suffering, the weary destinies of the

peoples, on whom "the burden of the unintelligible world" is bound so hardly, so unequally.

Phaulcon, stung, enraged, shame-maddened, laughed out in defiance of the scorn that lashed him like a whip of scorpions.

"Fine acting—you were always a fine actress!—but this could come as nothing new to you, Miladi. You were sure enough that my friends and I were in it——"

"God forgive me! I *was* sure until you swore your innocence; and then—though I might have known that truth trying to pass *your* lips would become falsehood in such tainted passage!—I did you too much honor, and—believed you."

No virulence and no invective could have cast on him so much shame and so much scorn as these last two words.

He laughed coarsely and carelessly still; where he felt himself a coward there he became a bravo; with the rankling wound of humiliation came the brutalized instinct to insult.

"*Said* you believed me rather! The Countess Vassalis was always famous for her finesses. Beyond a doubt she had the tact to assume a fitting ignorance of anything that might have compromised her, and, by all appearances, set her desires on this colossal courier in a fashion that would have made it awkward, had he chanced to know that she was banded with his (what is the word?) assassins!"

The blood rushed over the weary dignity of her face; she looked him full in the eyes till his own fell; she deigned no further answer.

"Idalia!" he stammered, more huskily and hurriedly; he had always, of later years, feared her even while he tortured her.

"You have lost all title to call me by that name. Put land and sea between us henceforth for evermore. Never let me look upon your face again—never, never, never!"

Her voice losing its controlled coldness, broke from her with an irresistible intensity, while as her arm pointed outward to the waters, she shuddered from him as men shudder from some loathed corruption, and banished him from every soil she touched, from every air she breathed. For one moment the force of the magnificent gesture,

rather than of the words of banishment, thrilled, awed, intimidated him; he shrank a little, and fell back involuntarily a step or two upon the tawny sands.

"Go, go!" she said, still with that movement of her hands which thrust him from her with such superb command as that wherewith the Scandinavian priest thrust back with his golden crosier the bloodstained King who came with murder on his soul. "Go! Show the only remorse and reparation that you can still reach, and let my life be free of you forever."

Again it had its weight on him, that sentence of banishment, grandly given, yet withal having in it a certain aching regret as of one who once had loved him well, though he had fallen; as of one who owed him deadliest wrong and abhorred in him deadliest guilt, yet who, for memories not wholly perished, could not yield him up unpitied to the dominion of evil, to the wreck of body and soul. He remembered all that this woman had endured through him; he remembered how by him shameful treachery had attainted the glorious morning of her youth; how by him shadows that could never wholly pass from her had been flung across the splendor of her womanhood.

"Idalia, hear me a second," he said, with a gentler accent in the hesitation of the words. "You think I bear you no tenderness—I do, by Heaven I do, though often I come so near to hate you. If I had been at Antina, that Roman brute should never have touched you. Now—now and ever since I first heard of you in his fangs, I have been seeking you. And it is in peril of my life I stay an hour in the kingdom; twofold peril—from the Bourbon's grip, and from one surer still to know it and to strike."

"Surer? One does not live."

"Yes, *one* does; one that is ten thousand eyes and ears and lips incorporate, one that is thrice ten thousand intellects fused together, one that may strike me down from behind, and throw me like a dead dog into a wayside ditch, only for this, that I disobeyed and stayed in Naples to be near your prison."

She gave an involuntary movement, half shudder and half sigh; she knew that the "many in one" he spoke of, the far-reaching invisible hand, the wide, unerring previ-

sion and condign vengeance that he dreaded, were those of the political society to which he had been bound in the early days of his manhood, when fretting poverty nad goaded, restless intrigue had allured, and a warped yet at the first not ignoble love of freedom and of country had impelled him to its far-spread nets.

"You say this? So you also said, by all you held most sacred, that you had no share in and no knowledge of this attempted murder?"

She spoke slowly, and with icy chillness that cast back on him a hundredfold more piercingly than by invective the thousand times of falsehood when he had dealt treacherously by her, and so forfeited all right, all power to force on her that he now uttered truth. The last two words cut asunder, and broke down as though they had never been, the softer, better thought, that in the moment previous had made him well-nigh forget all else except the peril of death, or of a life worse than death, to which she, wronged in so much, had but so late escaped by a hair's breadth. All his jealous hate leaped up aflame.

In that instant while she spoke the fear had passed from him, the knowledge of his power had risen again; jealousy, and avarice, and passionate lust of tyranny were stronger-lived in him than the sting of conscience, than the awakening of shame. He hated her now with a ruthless hate, in which such wavering and selfish love as he had through all borne her, died.

"Perdition! You balked me once in my night's work. You will not make me miss him again. Wait an instant," he said through his teeth. "There is too close a tie between us for us to part in that fashion."

"To a tie that you have outraged you cannot appeal."

"We are too needful to each other to sever so——"

"I am needful to you, doubtless. But you will never again make of me, or tool, or weapon, or guide, or gold-mine for your evil service."

"Ah! Fine thing a woman's word. But a few days since you told me, with imperial scorn, that you *had* some reverence for your oath?"

"I had;—how much, let all I have lost, and sinned, and wrecked, and slain for you bear witness."

"And yet!——"

"And yet—here in your hands I break it, and break from it. I am absolved from my vows forever. *I* swore them to a patriot; you I know not—*you*, a brigand, an assassin!"

"Is an apostate nobler than an assassin, then, that you vaunt your treachery and upbraid mine?"

"Nobler in nothing; but apostacy is your guilt, not mine. To truth, to liberty, to the peoples, *I* am loyal; you have forsaken these—forsaken! were you ever true to them? did ever you know aught of them?—and leagued yourself with fraud, with avarice, with slaughter."

"Bitter words, madame."

"Bitter? God pardon you!—if you heard but sheer and simple justice of all your traitorous guilt to me, would not the blackest words in language fail to yield your due? But—let us part in silence; I cannot give you over to your proper fate, for the sake of the only life we ever cherished in common. But tempt my vengeance—my justice—no longer; if you are wise, go—go while I can still let you go unharmed."

"I stayed, at peril of life, to succor you if I could, to learn your fate, to find your enemies, and, in reward of that, saw you ten hours ago lavishing love upon your foreign favorite, on his heart, in his arms—*you!*"

"Well?"

She looked him full in the eyes still, with a deep and steady gaze; there was a firm, lowering gloom in her own, like the look which comes into the eyes of one who, brave and resolved, still counts the danger that lies before him, and finding it vast, yet resolves but the more fixedly to go through it.

"You did it belike to dupe him?" he pursued, with the insolent riot of his silver-toned laughter, the louder because he had no belief in his own translation of her acts. "He had a strong arm to force back your jail bars, and a wild brain to be lulled with your charming. You played the comedy with many—who so well?—was it but acted once again with him? You have done scores of finer finesses, and daintier and more dangerous things, in waking love than so easy a victory as blinding and duping this Scottish

athlete, and you have fooled men for far less stakes than to free yourself from the gripe of our holy Monsignore. Tell me that was your project, and I will pardon it, though you blackened my name so heavily in the little melodrama. Was it? Yes, or no!"

"No!"

The answer was brief and cold; she knew that for it this man was like enough to fire into her bosom, where he stood before her, the weapon whose muzzle thrust itself out from the folds of his striped canvas shirt.

For once he kept himself cool; she knew him then to be at his worst; his vehement, eloquent, womanish passion of wrath was never so dangerous as when, contrary to all his temperament, he held it in check and waited, softly, silently, warily.

"No?" he laughed in echo. "What! has Miladi Vassalis gone scathless in her scorn for all these years to be charmed by a rough rider's mountain sinews and gigantic limbs at last! Bathos!—terrible bathos! And what will you do, madame, with your new lover?—have him killed to keep the secret of your weakness, like that fair frail Jewess of the French Regency of whom we read?"

Under the coarse infamy of the sneer her face never flushed, her eyes never relaxed their sturdy challenge of him; but a hatred beyond all words gathered darkly in her regard, a scorn beyond all words set on her colorless lips.

"What will you do with him?" he repeated, scoffingly. "How will you square his claims and mine? If you should get your liberty again, my Countess, your favorite courier will slightly embarrass you!"

"You possess no claims."

"Truly? We will see that. But first, what will you do with him?"

"What shall I do? I will tell you. Give him my life, and defy yours."

"Ah! As his mistress or his wife?"

"His wife."

"Indeed! And make h'm a chieftain in Roumelia, I suppose?"

"Why not?"

"Why not, truly! He will be admirably fitted to play the mountain king, the barbaric lord; and you—well, your new fancy may endure six months. I will give it that lease of life; and then—men easily disappear in those hill fastnesses, where every creature is your humble vassal!"

Her face flushed with a dark tempestuous shadow as she heard; she gave one movement, rapid, passionate, involuntary—it was to raise her pistol for the signal shot. The gesture was restrained; she looked her antagonist firmly in the eyes.

"Cease this. There are none here to be cheated with your outrages, and to insult me will bring you no result. Once for all, hear and understand;—this one man has become dear to me, and, what is more, is honored by me. I shall be true to him, and I shall defend him—as he has given truth and defense to me."

The words were very passionless, but they were inflexible as steel; his face changed lividly as he heard.

"Wait!" he said, savagely, as he seized her wrist. "You know the fate we give deserters?"

She calmly loosed her arm from him.

"Death? Well, you can slay me if you will. It will worthily close your course. But be sure of this—you will not scare me with the threat of it."

"Threat! Miladi, you will find it more than threat."

"Too likely. But I shall be his before it becomes fact."

"What! you love him well enough to risk death for him—*such* a death!—by night, by stealth, in your beauty, in your youth?"

"Else should I love little."

The Greek ground hard his beautiful smiling teeth, and looked at her in silence a moment. He had dealt with her in many moods, but never yet in one where this passion ruled her. He had never known its pulse beat in her; he was stunned and bewildered by his own rage; he could almost have found it in his soul to deal her there and then the fate that she so tranquilly accepted and defied.

"Wait, then," he said, while his words stole out one by one, ferocious, but yet slow and chill as ice. "You do not fear it for yourself—do you for him?"

She did not answer; he saw a slight shiver pass over

her; he had found the one weak link through which to pierce the armor of her proud and resolute strength.

"You do? That is well. Then listen to one warning: the first night this man sleeps in your arms shall be his last. Wed him and kill him, if you like!"

CHAPTER XXX.

"THE SERPENT'S VOICE LESS SUBTLE THAN HER KISS."

THE fishing hamlet lay under the shadow of a great sea-worn, red-brown, sullen cliff, that had the mists of the dawn still on its rugged forehead, and the foam of the uprising tide now angrily splashing its feet; a mighty fortress of rock, that would break from its gloom to a wonderful beauty when the sun should come round to the west, and the glory spread over the waters. There were but four or five cabins, dropped in among the loose piles of stone and the pale plumes of the sand grasses; huts low nestled, and hidden like the nests on northern beaches of the sea-hovering tern. And these, few as they were, were deserted; the men had been out two days and two nights with their boats and their nets — out far beyond where craggy Ischia lay, and their woman-kind were alone left, with children like Murillo's beggars, wild haired and ruddy cheeked, and with naked limbs of a marvelous mould and grace, who lived all day long waist-deep in water, and slept all night long on a wet soil, and not seldom crushed the seaweed between their bright hard teeth in the sheer longing of famine, and yet who, with all that, might have thanked God, had they known it, that they were born by the water's width and to the water's liberty, instead of in the stifling agony of cities, where human lives breathe their first and their last, never having known what one breath of ocean wind blows like, or what the limitless delight of a horizon line can mean. The wo-

men were fine animals—and nothing more. Those who were young were splendidly colored and built; those who were past youth were sere, and yellow, and scaly as the fish they smoked and hung to the beams of their huts for the winter's fare. They said little, comprehended less. The shine of silver made their eyes glisten, but they could give nothing in return for it. Of the boats, there was not one left; not the craziest craft that ever was hauled high upon a beach to be broken up into firewood; nor of the boys did one remain of years enough to handle a rope or hold a tiller. Here, on this barren shore, there was no help; the great freedom of the sea stretched there as though in so much mockery; it would yield nothing—save a grave.

He stood on the narrow strip of yellow sand, with the ripple of the high-tide rolling upward and over his feet, and looked over the sweet, fresh, tumultuous vastness of the waters as men, when camels and mules, and even the hardy sons of the soil, have perished one by one in their rear, look over the stretch of the desert where no aid is to be called, no change can come, except the aid and the change of the death that shall leave their flesh to the vulture, their bones to the bleach of the noon.

All he had done had been in vain.

Reaching the sea, they were as far from liberty as when the monastery's doors had closed them in; unless some vessel could be chartered to bear westward before the day should be at its meridian, they must turn back, and share the wolf's lair, the hare's terror, the stag's life of torture, when on every breeze may come the note of chase, when every curling moss and broken leaf may bear a mark to bring the hunters down. An intense agony came on him as his eyes looked blindly out at the gray waste, with the sun's first rays reflected in a broad crimson trail across its gloom. The desire of his heart was come to him, and with it had come also to him an exceeding bitterness passing any that his life had known. That which he had coveted with so passionate a longing was granted him, and it brought with it a terrible penalty. The weight of a sickly dread, never before then known to the fearlessness of his nature, oppressed him; a dread that had its root less in

her physical danger than in the darkness that shrouded all knowledge of her real fate, all knowledge of her past and of her future.

And even for her mere bodily peril, her peril from the chains and the cells of the government, he could do nothing; he could defend her to his last breath with such strength as one man could bring against thousands—that was all. There was not a sail in sight, as far as his eyes could reach over the water line; it might be two or three nights more yet, as the women told him, before the fishing-boats would come in; to leave her for the length of time needful to traverse the coast in search of some other sea-side hamlet was impossible; he saw no course but to retrace his steps to her, and leave the choice of their retreat with her. These people were miserably poor, and would do what was asked of them for the sake of the glitter of gold; they were bold, too, and willing to offer such shelter as their miserable cabins could; at the worst, it was possible that they might rest undiscovered under the refuge of these lonely rocks until such time as the fishing fleet, returning, should give them means to sail westward, or send a vessel with orders to the yacht.

He stood there some moments, looking seaward from the beach, his head sunk, his thoughts very weary; he was condemned to the torture of inaction, the deadliest trial that can be fastened on high courage and on eager energies; he turned swiftly as he heard steps lightly passing along the pile of rough loose stones that made a sort of stairway from the high ground, down between two steep and leaning sides of rock; he looked up in anxious hope of welcoming some boatman who could help him to a vessel; as he did so, the morning sun, shining from the east, that faced him as he turned, fell full upon his head and throat, and on his tall athletic limbs, loosely clad in the linen folds of the fishing-dress. Standing thus, catching the brightest glisten of the morning beams, the barcarolo dress served little to disguise him, and through the mist-wreaths that still hovered round all the upper border of the shore, his eyes, ere escape or avoidance was possible, met those of the man above upon the broken tiers of cliff.

They were the keen blue serene eyes of Victor Vane.

For a moment they looked in silence at each other, met thus, face to face, in the coolness of the young day, in the solitude of the unfrequented shore. On the one side amazement was sincere; on the other, it was to perfection counterfeited. Then, with an easy supple grace, the man, in whom Erceldoune's instinct felt a foe, swung himself downward from ledge to ledge, and dropped upon the sands beside him, with the common courtesies of a carelessly astonished and complimentary greeting.

"I came to bathe; I am staying at a villeggiatura not far from this," he said, as his words of welcome closed. "It is a wild shore here, and unutterably lonely. You are yachting, I suppose?"

"No."

Erceldoune thought nothing of what was asked him, of what he answered; he thought of her alone. This man was her friend, her guest, her associate; could he be trusted with her secret? could he be trusted to assist her flight? And, if not trusted with it, could he be held back from the knowledge of it?

"Not yachting?" pursued Vane, carelessly still. "I thought that fisher-costume was surely a sailor's dress. May I ask what brings you, then, to this world-forgotten nook?"

"I came to get a boat, and a boat's crew if I could."

"Ah! you have lost your way? There is a dangerous landslip hard by——"

Erceldoune crushed his heel down into the wet loose sand; a gesture that was not lost on his companion.

"I know the coast well. I merely need a boat—of what kind matters little. Can you help me?"

"I grieve to say no. My friends' residence is some way from here; and, besides, they have not even a pleasure skiff; they care nothing for the water. But you would not put out to the open sea in a mere boat?"

"Why so?"

"Why! Because I fancy no man would who was not weary of his life, or——"

"I am not weary of mine."

"Pardon me, I was going to end my sentence with—or one whose life was menaced on the land."

He spoke the last words gravely, gently, meaningly,

with an emphasis that left no doubt of their personal application. Erceldoune's forehead flushed with a hot dark rush of blood; a tempestuous shadow came in his eyes; he turned abruptly.

"Explain that phrase?"

"Nay; translate it yourself, if you will."

"Not I. I am in no mood for enigmas, and have no time for them. You had your meaning; out with it!"

He spoke between his clinched teeth; a fiery misery possessed him, and a great longing to wring the truth out of this man who cross-questioned him, if he wrung it by force with a hand on his throat and a heel on his chest.

Victor Vane looked him steadily in the eyes; a serious, compassionate, candid gaze that silently rebuked his passions and his instinct of antagonism.

"I am sorry you trust me so little," he said, briefly.

Ornamented protests would have forewarned and forearmed his listener, whom the simplicity and manliness of the reply put off his guard; they made the loyal, generous nature that they dealt with repent as of some craven sin of false suspicion; rebuke itself, as for some ignominy of cowardly injustice. Moreover, Erceldoune saw that he knew much—how much it was best to learn at once, let the learning cost what it should.

"He has eaten at her board; he has enrolled himself her friend; he cannot turn traitor to her; he cannot play false to a woman!" his thoughts ran swiftly, in the tumult of a thousand emotions. It seemed to him so vile a thing, that to suspect even his rival of it looked base to him.

"Let us waste no words," he said, rapidly, while he stood facing the new-comer with the challenge of his gallant eyes testing the truth of those which met them. "Time is life to me, and more than life! You guess rightly so far. Answer me two things. What do you know?—and why should you be trusted?"

"The latter question, I imagine, one gentleman should scarcely put to another!"

"That may be. I am in no temper for these subtleties. I know nothing of you except through rumor. Such rumor would not incline me to place confidence in you. You used strange language; you seem aware of my present peril. Simply, say what it is you know."

Victor Vane, with a dignity that had in it the compassionate forbearance of one who respects and pities another whose insolence he can afford to pass over and extenuate, seated himself on the lowest stair of rock, and answered, without hesitation, in a grave and regretful accent:

"Sir, I forgive your innuendo on myself, since the extremity of your peril may serve to excuse it, and I believe that this peril has fallen on you through a rashly noble and generous action. We have met here singularly enough. I do not know—positively—anything of your actions or position; but I should be half a fool did I not divine much of both. Briefly, we are both acquainted with a fair revolutionist, who has been made a prisoner of the royal executive. I heard, late last night, that she had been rescued from her captivity—rescued by a man in a fisher dress, who displayed the most reckless chivalry in her defense, and even implicated himself so deeply as to use violence to Giulio Villaflor, whereby Monsignore lies now in danger at his Cistercian monastery. I heard this; such news soon spreads, specially to Court and Church; and I heard also that both soldiers and sbirri are on the track of the fugitives, who are known to have made their way seaward. Now can you wonder that it needs no great exercise of intelligence to recognize in you the barcarolo who despoiled Church and State of their captive, and to conclude that the vessel you stand in need of is to be employed in the service of Miladi Idalia, for whom, living or dead, both Church and State would give as weighty a reward as the full coffers of the one and the lean treasures of the other could afford to yield? Scant penetration is requisite for such a discovery; every sailor on the coast will make it with me in a few hours' time. It is not a little thing to free a political prisoner, and to leave a mighty prelate half dead among his own monks."

He spoke perfectly quietly, his eyes, with an unusual melancholy, looking straight and calm into the eyes of the man before him;—eyes that said without words, "You see—she and you are in my power. One word from me, and both are lost!"

Erceldoune gazed at him, answering nothing; his chest and sides heaved like those of some magnificent forest ani-

mal caught in the toils of the trapper. He cared nothing for his own life; he would have sold it dearly, content enough, if he died worthily; but she——For her he had no strength; for her he had no courage; for her he could sue what he would never for himself have sought; for her the grave was horrible to him, and had its sickliest terror.

To parry facts with lies, to turn aside discovery with subtle feints, was not in him; to deny that which he knew to be a truth never even passed his thoughts. This was another calamity, another danger—the darkest, perhaps, that could have come on them; but his instinct was to brave and meet it, not to slink from it under a poltroon's mask of falsehood. He went with a single step close up to his companion's side, and stood above him.

"Grant your conclusions right—what then?"

"That is rather for you to answer. Your future is a very hazardous one."

"I did not speak of my future, but of your course. What will it be?"

"Do you insinuate that I should betray you?"

"I do not insinuate; I ask. If the world may be believed, you have not been always noted for your fealty."

"Coarse language, and not overwise——"

"I cannot stop to refine, nor yet, perhaps, to reason. Tell me how I am to deal with you. As friend or foe?"

"Sir, that is scarcely the way to learn. Diplomacy would not dictate such rough and ready questions."

"Possibly. But I am no diplomatist."

"I imagine not. No one would suspect you of it."

"Spare your satire. Give me a plain answer."

"Not a popular thing, commonly."

Erceldoune shook with rage. This play of words was to him in his extremity as the tickle of the whip's light lash is to the caged tiger in its wrath. He flung himself away with an unconscious violence.

"Do your worst, if you choose to do it. Go and turn traitor against the woman at whose table you sat, and under whose roof you were welcome! Adventurers fitly end in renegades."

As he turned his back on the other, and moved across the sand to retrace his steps to her, Vane rose and silently

followed him, and touched his arm with the slight velvety touch of a woman.

"Wait. You mistake."

Erceldoune paused, and looked him full in the face.

"Show my error, and I will confess it."

Vane smiled a little, in compassion. This nature, so warm, so bold, so frank, so free from every suspicion, so willing to avoid every injustice, seemed to him so pitiable in its simplicity; its naked strength, that could so easily be pierced; its unselfish impulses, that could so easily be duped; its creed of truth, that was followed so blindly and so recklessly!

"You wrong me," he said, with that tranquil dignity which had again replaced the ironic frivolity of his usual manner—"wrong me greatly. Think but a moment, and you will yourself see how. The cause for which Madame de Vassalis has been arraigned is mine; would it be likely that I should find favor with Court or Church, even were I base enough to seek it? She is the life, the soul, the inspiration, often the treasury, of our projects, the Manon Roland of our Girondists; is it not palpable that what strikes at her must strike at us? Besides, leaving every such reason aside, can you believe that, as a guest, I should harm my hostess; as a man, betray a woman? Rather do me some measure of justice. Believe, at least, that I can have some admiration of your fearless chivalry, some sympathy for your generous daring; quixotic I may deem it, but reverence it I must."

Erceldoune heard him, swayed against his judgment, influenced against his instincts. The tone of the appeal touched that knightly temper of trust and of liberality that was always dominant in him; he hated this man, but to let his hate prejudice him to injustice seemed very vile in his sight; he thought that he owed a wider measure of justice, a more generous extension of tolerance, to an enemy than a friend; where his impulses set him against, there he felt that his honor should more closely strive for fairness to a foe. A code that had in its results, perchance, a folly unutterable, yet had in its root a magnanimity and a majesty scarce less great, and such as men would do well to strive after in giving judgment.

"Trusted, even a scoundrel will quit his baseness. And—if he has ever loved her, he can hardly be a traitor to her,"—his thoughts ran as he paused there, and heard the measured sweetness of his rival's voice. And on those thoughts he spoke, making the error that costs so many dear—the error of gauging another character by the measure of his own.

"If I wronged you, I ask your pardon. Your jests fell sharply on a heart so sore as mine. You have our lives in your power; for her sake, hold them sacredly. All the help you can give us is silence. I thank you for your promise of that. Farewell! And forget my words if they did you an injury. They were spoken in passion and haste."

For the moment the words touched his hearer; awoke something of shame, something of admiration, something of compassion, that had no scorn in it, but a dim instinct of honor for the noble madness that believed in him, for this self-rebuke that was spoken so generously, content to take blame rather than to hold to an unjustified suspicion. All the cruelty of jealousy, all the pitilessness of hatred, all the unmerciful heartlessness of craft, were in him against the man whom he instinctively knew that the woman he coveted loved. Yet they were for an instant stilled under the vague emotion that woke in him—that emotion of involuntary homage which even the shallowest and the basest natures will at times yield reluctantly to the greatness of a brave sincerity. But it was very fleeting with him; too fleeting to change the hard set purpose that had possessed him from the moment when his knowledge of his rival's temper had made him at once divine who had been the deliverer of their mistress, and had sent him seaward to trust to hazard for the accident that should bring him across the fugitives' path.

He stretched his hand out.

"That was very nobly said." And in those words he spoke but what he truly thought. "Sir Fulke, we may surely be friends?"

Erceldoune looked steadily at him, and did not take his hand.

"Pardon me—my friendships are few, and I add to them

rarely. Aid *her*, and no friend shall be so close to me as you."

"You speak strongly Is Madame de Vassalis so dear to you, then?"

"Judge by the risk I have run for her."

"True! You are not the first——"

"The first for what?"

"Well—the first who thought his life will last for her. And—forgive me the question, I have known her so long—what does she say to you for it?"

"I fail to apprehend you."

"You do? I mean, what reward does that fairest and most fatal of sorceresses promise you if ever you escape the dangers you have incurred for the sake of her eloquent eyes?"

He saw Erceldoune's grasp tighten on the hilt of the weapon thrust in his sash, and his teeth close on his lips under his beard.

"Her insults are mine," he said, curtly. "By what right do you use such a tone?"

"By what right do you constitute yourself her champion? It will be a thankless office."

"By the right of a man to defend his wife's honor."

In the deep shadow of the overhanging cliff he did not see the ashen color to which the fairness of his listener's face faded; in the tumult of his own thoughts and passions he did not hear the quick, sharp catch of his companion's breath. The tranquil gaze bent on him lightened an instant with a tiger's hunger to kill; the look soon passed; Vane laughed a little, very softly, very slightly.

"Ah! Miladi must think her jeopardy very imminent. She never proffered so heavy a bribe before."

Erceldoune's hands fell on his shoulders, swaying him heavily to and fro.

"What do you dare to mean by that?"

"Simply what I say. If she bribe so high, she must think her peril equal."

"Why? Am I so loathsome?"

"Certainly not. You are a magnificent man; just the man for a lover. But marriage——"

"Finish your sentence. Marriage——"

"May be a word on her lips, but will never be a chain upon her liberties."

"You dare to mean——"

"Release me, and I will tell you what I mean. I do not speak for any threats of force."

Erceldoune slowly let go his hold, and stood before him with the morning sun-gleam on his face that was stormily flushed, and wore the look on it that comes in a dog's steady gaze when a leash holds him back from his antagonist. His rival's eyes met his serenely; in the calm transparent depths there was an unspoken pity that made his blood glow like lava.

"In a word—I mean this. She has bought you with syren words; do you dream how many she has bought likewise before you, and—destroyed?"

"I know that no man living shall insult her name to me unpunished."

"Ah! you will stop my lips with a blow? You can, if you choose; you have ten times my strength; but honorable women do not need such tragical defense. And, let me ask you one thing only before you refuse to hear me."

"Ask it."

"Who fired at you in the Carpathians?"

In the warm glow of the summer dawn Erceldoune's limbs grew chilly with a sudden sickly cold. He did not answer. He divined the drift of the inquiry; and, knowing what he now knew of her recognition of his assassin, he could not bring his voice to speak of it.

"You do not know! You should do so. Did you ever ask this woman who is to be your wife?"

His chest heaved heavily with hard-drawn breaths; his memories were with the evening just passed by, when the sunset had shed its ruddy hues on the face of the slumbering Greek, and she had bid him spare that worthless life with a passionate force of supplication to which she had never stooped when her own existence had been in jeopardy. But he was too loyal to her for his answer not to rise hot and instant to his lips.

"Ask her? Would I do her so much outrage?"

"Yet no one could tell you so well."

"What! you are vile enough to say——"

"The villainy is not *mine!* I say that the Countess Vassalis can tell you better who is the man that sought to take your life than can any one else in Europe."

Erceldoune heard in silence; he felt giddy, blind, heart-sick; his knowledge of her association with the Greek was lying like a dead weight on the indignant scorn with which he would, without it, have flung back the insult offered her; the remembrance was upon him of her intercession that had screened the criminal from justice, of her conjuration that had interposed between the guilty and his retribution, of her agony of shame and of terror that had broken and bent her haughty nature like a reed.

"You lie," he said, savagely, unwitting what he did say, seeking only to defend her at all hazards. "She *never* knew;—he is her foe not less than mine."

"Ah! she has spoken of him, then?"

"What if she have?"

"Nothing. Only she is still less scrupulous than I imagined. She said he was her foe, did she? What other things did she say of him?"

Erceldoune's hand seized him by the linen of his vest, and shook him as a strong grasp will shake the slender stem of a larch-tree. His mouth was parched; his words came slowly and incoherently:

"You will make a brute of me! You have some hellish meaning hidden—speak it out, if you have a man's heart in you. What would you dare bring against her?"

Victor Vane freed himself with difficulty, and moved slightly aside; but there was no anger in the serenity of his voice, only some pity and much patience.

"I have nothing hidden; if you hear me, you will know as much as I know. I see your error; many have made it. You have thought in such divinity of form divinity of soul must dwell. Scores have made your mistake, and died for it—as you may before the game is out. Miladi has had many lovers, and—dead men tell no tales."

He paused; his rival's hand was on his mouth, and the steel tube of a pistol was pressed against his forehead.

"Another syllable like that, and, by Heaven! I will shoot you with the lie on your lips."

Courage had never been lacking in him; his eyes looked

up none the less tranquilly into the dark, flushed, haggard face above him, though the cold ring of the weapon pressed its mark on his skin.

"Of course you can if you choose. I am unarmed. You will oblige your sovereign mistress, too. I know many of her secrets."

Erceldoune's arm fell to his side; he shivered through all his frame; he could not use violence to a man without the power to return it; he could not force to silence words which, if he refused to hear them, he would seem to know were true in all their shame. He dropped the pistol down on the sands between them, and crossed his arms on his chest.

"Say your worst. Our reckoning shall come later."

"Well, my worst is—the truth. You love this woman; but you are not in her confidence; you never will be."

He saw a quiver of pain break the wrath on his listener's face, and he saw that the bolt had struck home.

"You believe everything she tells you? I never found the man who did not credit what she chose to make him. You worship her, but you worship your own ideal in her. I have seen scores do that. I doubt if a man can look long at her, and see clearly, unless he has known her well, and comes forewarned to her—as I came. Well, you have thought her a mistress for 'Shakspeare's self;' you have seen her in great dangers; you have imagined her foully wronged; you have cast away all your heart on her, and now are casting your life away after it. And you do all this without ever having asked yourself and the world what a woman must be who, titled, is yet out of society; who, young, yet recklessly defies all custom; who, rich, can summon round her none but men, and those men adventurers or conspirators; who shelters your assassin in her Turkish gardens, yet affects all ignorance of his identity or vicinage; and who, driven at last to speak of him, tells you he is her foe, yet omits altogether to explain why, if so, she has so long shielded him from your discovery and the law's justice. You love, and therefore you are blind. Yet is it possible that even the blindness of passion can be so utterly dark that you have never remembered all these things?"

The black blood gathered in his listener's face; he kept his passions down, because, for her sake, he held it best to hear all her calumniator would bring against her, but they well-nigh mastered him, rising the darker and the stronger for the keen pang of *truth* that every shaft of the abhorred words stung him with—truth that she had herself placed it beyond his power to refute.

"Go on," he said, in his teeth. "You called yourself her friend, I think?"

The rebuke was bitter, yet it did not move the man it lashed.

"Scarcely so much," he returned, quietly. "Her acquaintance—indeed, her associate in not a few political matters—but scarcely her friend. Miladi's friendships are too perilous. Look you; I *had* a friend once, an Austrian, though I bear Austria no love. We had been lads together in Venetia, and the war-lusts failed to divide us. I think he was the brightest and the bravest nature I have ever known. Well, in an evil hour he fell, as you have done, under the eyes of Idalia. He had a military secret in his keeping; a secret, granted, that was of import to Italy, so perhaps you will deem what she did was justified for Italy's sake. I might have done, had I not known him from his boyhood; I might have done;—who touches politics fast grows a knave. Simply, she made him worship her, as she makes you; sunned him in her smiles, leant her lips on his, let him lie in Eden for awhile, till sense and judgment were both gone—as yours are gone. Then, while she promised him her beauty as its price, she stole his secret from him—bought it with those caresses you believe are only yours—and, when his honor was yielded up to her, turned him adrift with a laugh at his weakness. Ah! that is Miladi! So—I saw him shot one sunny summer dawn; with the balls in his throat, fired by a volley of his own cuirassiers. Politically, we owed her much; personally, I never in my soul could trust the woman who betrayed Hugo."

Erceldoune shook through all his limbs; the spasm not alone of rage, but of a more cruel emotion. The tale had too close a likeness with her own self-accusing confession, her own keenness of remorse, not to bear a terrible burden of possibility with it—a hideous surface of truth which

made it impossible it should be cast away as calumny. Yet through the dizzy misery that came upon him with the words he heard he grasped one thought still foremost of all—to defend her, and to cast back every aspersion thrown on her, as though no doubt could ever rest with him, as though she had never bade him believe the worst of her that the world could tell.

"Is that all you stayed me to tell?" he said, briefly. "It was not worth your while. I have no heed for libels."

"It is *not* all. I know well that my words are wasted, and that you think me a slanderer for them: that is a matter of course. Hugo thought me the same when I told him what the tenderness of his imperial mistress would prove worth. I never knew any man saved whom her smile once had doomed. I will not strain your patience longer; let us keep close to one fact—the attempt upon your life. You deny the association of Idalia with that crime?"

"I deny it—utterly."

His voice had a harsh vibration in it like the tone of one who speaks under unbearable physical suffering. He denied it in her name; but while he did so there ate like fire into him the remembrance of that shame, that horror, that remorse, that passion, with which she had looked upon the Greek, and held him from his vengeance. With his last breath he would have declared her guiltless; with his last thought held her so; yet the shadow of guilt fell on her, and he could not drive from her the taint and the tarnish of its reproach.

"You do? She is indebted for your chivalry," resumed the slow, sweet voice of his companion. "I see how little you must ever have heard of the finest mistress of intrigues that Europe holds, to yield it so unhesitatingly. Now bear with me a moment while I ask you why you are so certain that she had no share in the attack made on you?"

"Ask yourself. You know her."

"And you mean that none who do can doubt her being the proudest and the purest, as well as the fairest among women? Ah, but then I have passed by that stage; *I*

knew her by repute long before I ever saw her face. Your reasons then, for thinking her both innocent and ignorant of your attempted assassination are these: that she was on the spot at the time you were shot down; that she saved your life, and concealed the action even from yourself, allowing it to be believed that Moldavian herdsmen rescued you; that you chased the leader of the band as far as the gardens of her villa at Constantinople, and there lost sight of him, though the walls of the gardens were so disposed that he could only have been concealed within them, if not in the house itself; that she invited you to spend many hours alone with her in her Eastern hermitage, and so spent them that she found little difficulty in making you believe her all she would; that she then sought to throw you off by leaving you abruptly without any clew to her movements; and that when you persisted, against her wish, in seeking her, you found her, first the associate, and a little later the fellow-prisoner with the men of that very party of extreme liberalists to whom you have always attributed the murderous onslaught made on you. These are your reasons for holding her innocent of all treason to you; they would not be very weighty evidences in law and in logic."

As the chain of circumstances uncoiled link by link in the terse, unadorned words, it seemed to tighten in bands of iron about the heart of the man who trusted not less than he loved her. His face changed terribly as all the force of meaning and of circumstance arrayed itself against her, and the vague doubts, that he had strangled in their birth as blasphemies against her, stood out in unveiled language. A dogged, savage, sullen darkness lowered on his features; it had never been on them before then; it was a ferocity wholly akin to his nature, hardened and embittered by the knowledge of his own powerlessness to repel or to refute the evidence arraigned. They were but facts which were quoted—facts not even distorted in the telling; the inference drawn from them was the inevitable one, however his loyalty to her disowned it. He felt driven to bay; he was fettered to inaction by the knowledge that on him alone her safety hung; he was weighted to silence by the memories which thronged on him of her own acts

and words; of that poignant remorse which had sunk so deeply into her nature, of that self-condemnation which had so unsparingly condemned her. Yet amid all he never hesitated in her defense, and his eyes fastened on her accuser with a steady unyielding gaze.

"I am no casuist and no rhetorician," he said, in his teeth. "You are both. Once for all—no more words. If you have been her friend, you are a traitor; if you have been her foe, you are a slanderer. Either way, one word more, and I will choke you like a dog."

"An unworthy and a coarse threat. What falsehood have I told you yet? I named but facts."

"Your outline might be fact. It was your color was the lie."

"I think not. I can prove to you that your mistress was in the secret of your assassins."

"And your motive in that?"

The lion-like eyes of Erceldoune literally blazed their fire into those that met them with unchanged serenity. There were volumes in the three words; all of distrust, disbelief, hatred, and scorn that his heart held for the one who had turned counselor to him. Their sting pierced deep; but the wound of it was covered.

"My motive is this. A party with which I was to a great extent associated, yet from whose measures I very often dissented, implicated me by their extreme opinions in many courses that I utterly disapproved, and implicated my name still oftener unknown to me. I am entirely against all violence and all fraud—not from virtue—I do not affect virtue—but from common sense. Politically, much is permissible——"

"I am not inclined to hear your creed. I make no doubt that it is an elastic one! Your motive?"

"You pass it in your haste. I endeavor to explain it. I became entangled in earliest youth with men whose association has been the greatest injury of my career. I have never been able wholly to free myself from their influence, but I have long ceased to countenance their more unscrupulous intrigues—not from virtue, I distinctly say, from policy. It is a lack of sagacity that produces all crimes; nothing else; except an excess of animalism, which pro-

duces the same results, because it amounts to the same thing."

"Spare your ethics! Your motive?"

"Springs from the inability of my late associates to discern the kinship of crime and foolishness. When I first heard of your robbery, I had my suspicions; I was baffled in my inquiries; I believed that men with whom my name was connected were concerned in it, but they feared that I should learn their complicity, and for some time succeeded in concealing it. Recently—indeed, the day before the affair of Antina—I found my suspicions right. I am ashamed to say that I have traced that melodramatic villainy to those who call themselves of my party, although I have fully and finally broken off all collusion with them. In a word, I have felt disgraced that men with whom I have been allied should have been capable of such an outrage, and so much reparation as can lie in the acknowledgment is of course your immediate due. I care little how you revenge yourself, so that your vengeance may be the executor of mine for the deception passed on me. Moreover, in learning the truth of the crime you suffered from, I learnt what you have a right to know, since you believe the Countess Vassalis worthy the surrender of your own life, which is probably the cost you will pay sooner or later for your loyal efforts to save her."

Erceldoune breathed fast and heavily; a sickening sense of mystery, of treachery, of evil, of half-truths told him only that by them he might be led deeper into error, was upon him.

"Had I twenty lives, she commands them," he said, briefly. "Say out your meaning—honestly, if you can."

"Very simply, then;—the woman to whom you would give a score of lives, if you had them, has from first to last sheltered your assassin from you, and has counterfeited tenderness for you that she might gain an influence strong enough to enable her to turn aside your vengeance from the only man Idalia Vassalis ever loved."

The words were cold, clear, incisive, calm with the tranquillity of unwarped truth. Under them Erceldoune staggered slightly, like one who reels under a deep knife-thrust; his face grew black with a hot rush of blood, his hands fell

once more on his torturer's shoulders, swaying him dizzily to and fro.

"Own that you lie, or by——"

The closing oath rattled hard in his throat; in the moment he could have choked her traducer dead with no more thought, no more remorse, than men strangle the adder that has destroyed the life they treasure closest.

Vane, deficient neither in courage nor in supple strength, shook himself loose with a rapid movement, and lifting the pistol from the sands, held it out with a grave, graceful gesture, as though the weapon were a branch of palm.

"Take it back, and shoot me dead with it, if you find that I tell you untruth."

"*If!*"

"Yes—'if.' I am no slanderer weaving a legend; no gossiper trafficking in cobwebs. I tell you a hard, unglozed, pitiless fact; there are many such in the history of the woman you imagine has so stainless, so martyred, so royal a soul! Take back your weapon, and use it if I play you false. You are longing to kill me now—I see that in your eyes; but you are a lion, not a fox, and so you will not kill in the dark. Make it day about you, broad noonday, by which you can read the depths of your mistress's heart, and then—if she prove guiltless and I a liar—then compensate yourself as you will."

Erceldoune answered nothing, but he stretched his hand out and grasped the pistol in a silence that had more meaning than speech ever carried. A dusky reddened light was glowing in the darkness of his eyes—the light that glows in a dog's when the longing to seize and rend is rousing in it; his blood felt like fire; the dawn seemed to grow like night; the corrosion of a jealous hate was in him, and in its evil all other memories were drowned, all desires quenched, all loyalty loosened.

The other stretched his arm out and touched him as he turned and strode over the wet stone-strewn beach.

"Wait. Where do you go?"

"I go to 'make it daylight,' as you say—daylight strong enough to unbare your villainy."

"But first you must hear——"

"I have heard too much."

"Stop an instant. Remember, I have known the story of Idalia as you will never know it."

"The more you know, the more honor should bind you into silence."

"Madman! When I tell you——"

"Mad I may be. Rather that than a traitor."

"It is a traitress of whom we speak."

Erceldoune's eyes flashed a strange glance into his; it was scorching as fire, yet it had in it a terrible appeal.

"Take care what you do," he muttered. "You will *make* me kill you."

"No. But I will make you prove my words truth or slander."

"I go to do it."

"You think you do; you do not. You go to hear a few soft words from lips that have duped the subtlest intriguers in Europe, and to believe every phrase that they breathe with a kiss upon yours, as though it were witnessed by angels! I tell you that my honor shall not rest upon so wayward and so frail a thing as her caprice of invention."

"And *I* tell you that *her* honor shall not rest upon the tongues of traitors. You have dared to say she shielded my assassin——"

"I say more;—I say she loved him. No! Take your hand off; you can seek my life later on; at present you must save your own, if you do not want a Bourbon bullet through your lungs for this woman who has fooled you, as she fools us all. There is one man, one only, that your mistress ever loved. She has wearied of him now, found him a thorn in her side, learned to hate him as such women can hate, drawn all the fragrance from her rose, and thrown the old withered leaves away—only the leaves are poisoned, and they cling, they cling! One man she loved, and she lavished her gold on him, and she reared her ambitions for him, and she was half his slave and half his sovereign, while she was for all the world beside that beautiful, cruel, wanton, pitiless, divine, and devilish sorceress that we know. She has had many lovers, but she duped them all. This man she never duped. A panther, with a velvet eye and a glorious beauty; a sun-god, with the soul

of a fox and the heart of a carron-crow—nothing more. But who shall measure the passionate fancies of a woman? —and such a woman? Well, she loved him; and he was your assassin. No way so sure to shield him, as to bring you under her dominance! It may be, it is true, that while fooling you for his sake, you dethroned him, and she grew in earnest, and it is he who is now to be thrown *ad leones*. It may be; Miladi has had many such caprices! That you may know I say truth, and not falsehood, go and put but two questions to her. Ask her first, who the man is who left you for dead in the mountains. Ask her last, what the tie is that binds her to the Greek, Conrad Phaulcon."

Erceldoune had listened, without a word, without a breath, his face with that tempestuous darkness lowered on it, and a great horror, a great misery gazing vacantly out from his dilated eyes. Yet the loyalty and the faith in him were stronger than all tests that wrung them; he struggled to keep his hold upon them, and to keep them pure, unsoiled, unswerving, as men may strain to guard their honor unwarped, when all the dizzy world about them reeks with infamy, and presses them on to crime.

"I *will* ask her," he said, hoarsely, while his lips were white and dry as dust. "Not to prove her purity, but to prove your shame."

Then, without another syllable, he turned and set his face southward, and went by great swift steps, that sank into the sea-washed sand, backward to where he had left her—backward, with the waste of waters lying silent and untroubled by his course, and the sun rising higher from over the red wall of rock. Belief in what he had heard there was none, even yet, in his heart; off the brave allegiance of his rash nobility the evil fell, finding no grappling-place, no resting-lair; but on him a heavy, breathless, deadly oppression lay, and the first fear that his bold life had ever known ran like a current of ice through all his veins. The poison of doubt had been breathed on him, and its plague-spot widened and deepened, let him rend the canker out as he would.

Once in the agony of his passion he stretched out his arms to the vacant air as he went on in his loneliness, as

though he saw her beauty, and drew it to him, though death should come with it.

"Oh, my love, my love!" he muttered, unconsciously, in the longing of his soul. "What matter what you be, so you are *mine!*"

It was in the blindness of the senses that he spoke, the mere idolatrous desire for the loveliness that to him had no likeness upon earth; the cruel, intoxicated, fiery riot of the "love lithe and fierce" that counts no cost to itself or to its prey, and that would plunge into an eternity of pain to purchase one short hour of its joy. A moment, and the nobler passion in him rose; the perfect faith, without which his one idolatry would be but brutalized abandonment, rebuked him; his head sank, his eyes saw the gray glooming sea through a hot rush of tears.

"God forgive me so much sin to her as lay in the mere thought!" he murmured as he went; to think that the lips which had lain on his had ever breathed the kisses which betray, to think that the heart which had beaten upon his had ever throbbed to the warmth of guilty pleasure, seemed to him a blasphemy against her that was sin itself. For, even though those lips should be his, even though that heart should beat for him, if there were past treachery or present infidelity in her life, she would be dead to him—dead, more cruelly than though the steel had pierced the fairness of her breast, and the golden trail of her hair been drawn through the trampled dust of blood-stained streets

If truth abode not with her, and the fealty of honor, she was dead to him.

"If her eyes shrink from mine, let the seas cover me!" he prayed in his soul; and the length of the shore seemed endless to him, and the tawny stretch of the beach seemed the burning waste of a desert, and the surf, as it flowed up and broke at his feet, seemed to force his steps backward and backward, and to bind his limbs as with lead.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"LET IT WORK!"

For many moments Victor Vane stood motionless, following with his gaze the retreating shadow of the man in whom his instinct had from the first foreseen his rival. The grave patience, the gentle tranquillity, the subdued regret his features had worn throughout their interview, passed away; a thousand emotions, a thousand shades of thought, of feeling, and of suffering, swept over them; alone there, with no living thing near him save the white gulls resting on the curl of the incoming waves, he had no need to wear a mask, and he endured as sharp a misery as any he had dealt.

The deadliest pang in it was shame; the carking, jealous, bitter shame that where *he* had failed another should have won; the knowledge that the love borne her by the man who had left him was to the love that he himself had borne as the purity and value of purged gold against a pile of tinsel. It stilled in something the tortures of jealousy, it sated in something the thirst of hatred, to cast—were it only in thought—irony, and invective, and scornful calumny upon his rival; it was natural to him to despise with all the contempt of his fine and subtle intelligence a character that its own frankness and loyalty and high courage left naked to all poisoned shafts, and that was so rashly liberal in faith, so unwisely incapable of falsehood, so blindly and wildly careless to how it wrought its own weal and woe. Yet the most carking wound of all that now ached in him was the latent sense of *superiority* in the man who had supplanted him, who had succeeded where he had been vanquished, and whom he had regarded with the cold disdain of a flippant wit, as holding all his worth and merit in an athlete's mere physical perfections of thews and sinews. Steeled against all such emotion as he was, the greatness

and the nobleness of Erceldoune's faith forced themselves on him; they wrung a reverence out of him despite himself, and they dealt him a mortal pain; pain that was in one sense vanity-moved, since it would no longer leave him the one solace of scorn for his rival, but a pain that sprang from, and that moved, a deeper, better thing—a recognition, tardy and unwilling though it was, of some greatness he had missed in missing truth; some base and guilty cowardice that he had stooped to when once truth had passed off from his lips, banished with a scoff as only fit for fools.

Beyond jealousy, beyond hatred, beyond every other feeling in him as he stood looking southward at the great shaft of russet stone that screened the pathway of his rival from his sight, there was on him then an intense humiliation. Beside the sincerity, the fealty, the self-surrender, the brave patience of a generous trust, his own subtleties looked so unworthy, his own fine craft so poor; another could render her a love that deemed life itself well lost for her, and he—he was her traitor!

There was enough of honor and enough of tenderness in him for the contrast to strike into him, hard, sharp, swift as steel. This man whom he had contemned with all the mockery of his brilliant mind had grown great in his sight simply through the ennobling influence of a mighty passion and an heroic faith. He still cursed these with his lips as insanity, as idiotcy, but in his heart he knew their greatness—a greatness that he had by his own choice, his own act, put far from him forever.

Away in the world again he would again cleave to his old creeds, and deem the moment womanish weakness; but here in the loneliness of the morning, under the sting of an intolerable torment, the man he hated was great in his sight, and he himself was base exceedingly. Where he stood, with no eyes on him that could read his shame, a red flush slowly stole over the wanness of his face; none living could have brought it there, but the scourge of his own thoughts did.

"A traitor! a traitor!" he muttered to those silent seas that washed to and fro so wearily at his feet.

For though he had fallen willingly, the fall seemed to

him hideously vile; as in the gray, cold, unpitying light of a dawn that brings him no slumber, the sins and the burdens that a man counts recklessly and bears lightly in the crowds of the daytime and the dissipations of the night stand out in their true color, and grow unendurable in his sight and his memory.

But the better instinct too soon perished; there was passion in him, and passion choked conscience; he could not have told whether he most loved or most hated this woman, but whichever emotion swayed him furthest, the jealousy that he had so often laughed at as a barbarism of a bygone age was born of both, and in its fire quenched all other things. If it were true that Idalia loved this man who so loyally had served her!—in his own soul he did not doubt its truth, and it sufficed to nerve afresh in him every impulse of evil. He felt for her that covetous, sensual, pitiless growth of mingled envy, admiration, and ambition, which, long after all tenderness has perished out of it, will retain all its imperious egotism, and all its thirst for sweeping destruction of everything preferred before it. An acrid bitterness against her for her pride, her power, her keen wit, and her fearless intellect, had been blent with the earliest hours of his subjugation to her; and this served now to strengthen tenfold the fierce, mute, aching impatience of misery with which he now mused on the possibility that this woman, so cold, so merciless, so full of mockery for him, had ever stooped her haughty spirit down to the weakness she had often played with, and so often ridiculed.

"Is it possible! Is it possible! She—*she!*" he muttered, while his delicate lips shook and worked in the anguish which, in a youth, would have been spent in tears. "She—so victorious, so ironic, so chill, so world-worn, so magnificent, love for sake of a wanderer's eagle glances, a rough-rider's lion-graces! *She!*—a woman who could fill a throne, and rule it single-handed. Pshaw! she is a voluptuary, she is a coquette, she has her caprices—Miladi! And he is handsome as a gladiator. She loves him—oh yes—she loves him for six months, six weeks, six days. And what price will he pay for the paradise?"

The venomous words were murmured to the solitary

shore; even thus, and alone, it was a cruel solace to him to taunt her with those sneers, to soil what he had lost forever, to libel what he envied with so unquenchable a jealousy. It could not harm her thus to slander her, when none but the breaking surf and the fluttering sea-birds made answer, but he felt a relief in it, a joy kindred to that joy with which he had thought of her in the dungeons of the Capuano, when he had sold her into the hands of Giulio Villaflor.

Moreover, he believed what he said; partially because his suffering made him cling to whatsoever could lessen it, partially because the character of Idalia had escaped him in many of its hues, keen and varied as were the worldly experiences by whose light he had first set himself to read it. He had known of her through a thousand tongues ere ever he had looked upon her face; the poison-mists breathed from their distortions had never wholly faded from before her in his sight. Such a woman needs a mind singularly truthful and singularly liberal to understand her aright. Truth he had not in him, and to all talent save his own he was illiberal; thus he had failed in following the complex meanings of her life and of her thoughts. He had uttered but what he held himself when he had said that

> . . . . . beautiful she is,
> The serpent's voice less subtle than her kiss,
> The snake but vanquished dust; and she will draw
> Another host from heaven to break heaven's law.

But he had withheld what was not less true, that it was because she had this sin of merciless destruction in her, this serpent skill of tempting, this guilty power over the fates and souls of men, that he had first been fascinated to her dominion, and first seen in her a mistress by whom and with whom he could reach all to which his restless and insatiable ambitions aspired, and aspired in vain.

"Will he believe?" he wondered, as his eyes vacantly rested on the sands where the tide was filling the footprints of his rival. "Not he. What man would believe the witnessing voices of the whole world if *she* once whispered them false? And she pays him, too, with love-words, with

the sweetness of her lips, with the touch of hair on his cheek;—ah, God!"

He quivered from head to foot as the cry escaped him; he could have thrown himself on the sands and bidden the sea surge up and cover him, when he thought of that caress which already had been the reward of the man who had succored her. And he—he who betrayed her, what had he won by the treachery?

"Revenge at least," he thought; and as he thought so his head sank, his limbs grew rigid, his chest rose and fell with a single voiceless sob. He only remembered that revenge was valueless, since revenge could not bring him the lips that he longed for, the beauty that he desired as the ice-bound earth desires summer.

Valueless?—yet not so. It could not give her to him, but it could withhold her from any other.

A young, shy, gentle, little sea-bird, whose wings as yet could scarce bear it, rose at his feet as he mused, and fluttered a hand's breadth, and then trembled and fell, panting and glancing up with its bright dove-like, brown eye. He took it savagely and wrung the slender, snowy throat, and flung it out on to the crest of a breaker—dead. He had never before been cruel to birds or beasts; such fierce and wanton slaughter was not natural to him, but in this moment it had a horrible pleasure in its brutality. He had subdued all his impulses of hate so long, it sated them, if ever so slightly, to wreak them on that innocent bird. He had seen the dying eyes glaze and fill with misty fear with a gladness he would have believed impossible; he wanted to see hers fade out thus; to stand by and see them fade with just that look of terror and of helplessness;—eyes that had given such smiling scorn to him, such passionate eloquence to others. He watched the tumbled heap of white ruffled plumage washed in and out by the advancing and retreating sea.

"I can destroy her as easily as I killed that bird," he thought, and the worst instincts of his nature had their sway once more, as his mouth laughed with his slight, soft smile. "Barbaric! Terribly barbaric!" he murmured. "And I was so wise in my diplomacy with him; I told

him only truth. Talleyrand is right. Truth is so safe and so sure!"

Then leaving the dead bird floating on the water's play, he went whither he came.

"Monsignore will rally enough to sign an order," he mused. "A half-score soldiers, and they will be netted. Ah! his only mistress will be the galley-oar, and her only lover's embrace will be the fetters of the Vicaria. Miladi's new passion will not be smooth in its course!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

"SHALL EVIL BE THY GOOD?"

WHERE the Greek faced her on the sea-shore there was a long silence between them—a silence breathless and pregnant, like that which precedes the first low muttering of a storm, the first dropping shots of a battle. Her eyes dwelt on his with a terrible despair in their startled depths, and his laughed back into them with the insolence and arrogance of power. Many times their strength had come in conflict, and many times the variable, unstable, serpentine will of the man had been crushed under the straight, scornful, fearless will of the woman. Now, for the first time, he had his vengeance, and she could not strike back on him, because for the first time he had found weakness in her, and could reach her through the life of another.

He laughed aloud in his victory.

"Choose, Miladi! Your favorite maxims say, after the first passion all women love the love, not the lover. If you indulge the first you will slay the last. Choose!"

For all answer she swept with a sudden movement so close to him, that he fell back with the coward's instinct of physical fear.

"You have been often bought *for* murder. What price will you buy *from* it?"

The words left her lips with a scorn that burnt like flame, with a bitterness that cut like steel. Neither touched him; he laughed again in the content of his triumph.

"What price, my Countess? *None!*"

"You want gold—you love gold. You would sell your soul for gold. You shall have it."

The agony of dread upon her made her voice deep and hushed, like the stealing of an autumn storm-wind through forests; the passion of scorn within her made her face flush, and darken, and quiver, as though the flicker of a torch played on it. Neither moved him to shame.

"Oh, yes," he said, with a slow smile—"gold, gold, gold. Of course you would give me that. As much as you would throw away on a banquet, or a diamond, or a web of lace, should come to *me*, if I would stay aloof and hold my peace, and let the Border Eagle build his eyrie on the Roumelian hills, and Miladi pleasure her new passion among her rose-gardens. Oh, yes! gold—as much gold as you have twisted in your hair for a mask ball might be mine, of course; and he—he should succeed to Julian's dominion and Julian's domain; he should have all that wood and water, and palace and mountains, that I have been banned out of so long; he should be chief there, and lord, and his sons, may be, have the heirship of the Vassalis line! A charming cast for us both! With all gratitude for my share, and your will to allot it to me, I must decline such a distribution betwixt your lover and me. Gold, gold! No, Miladi, gold will not strike the balance between us now."

She listened in silence; only that passionate shadowy quiver, as of the light of a flame, on her face giving sign or response to him. Her lips were close pressed together, and scarce seemed to move as the words came through them, hard, like the dropping of stones on a stone.

"Your sin is envy? Well, it is only another to a long list. Mere gold will not buy you. What will?"

"Nothing."

"You are so incorruptible!"

"Yes, here."

"Through envy, avarice, and hate!"

"Through three common movers of mankind, if so."

"You own them yours? Then listen here I speak nothing of your guilt to me—nothing of your crime against him. I will deal with you as though none of all that measureless iniquity were on you. Conscience you have not; shame you do not know. I appeal to neither. I will treat with your avarice alone. You love self-indulgence, luxury, vice, mirth, indolence, splendor; you have coveted my heritage from the Vassalis, you have been thirsty for my riches; you have wanted all that Eastern pomp and princely fief, you have hungered for Count Julian's possessions, you have hated me for many things, yet for none so much as for the inheritance of that great wealth; that you used it, and wasted it, and were welcomed to it long as though it were your own, mattered nothing. It was mine, and not yours; you never forgave the difference. Well, hear me now. All that shall *be* yours—all—all—to the last stone of the jewels, to the lowest chamber of the palace, to the poorest fig-tree on the hills, to the farthest landmark on the plains. You shall have all, and reign there as you will."

An intense eagerness thrilled through her voice, the burning wavering light upon her face grew hotter and darker, the chained bitterness and fierceness in her gave but the subtler inflection to the eloquence and the command that ran as of old through all her words; for the moment, she dazzled and swayed and staggered him.

"All!" he echoed. "*I!*"

"Yes—all! Every coin, every rood, every bead of gold in that treasure-house of splendid waste I will make all yours—all that the Vassalis ever owned. I will not keep a pearl from the jewels, or a date from the palms. All shall be yours—all the things of your desire."

"And you?"

"I—I shall be beggared."

Yet while she spoke, over her face swept one swift gleam, like the glow of an Eastern sun.

He gazed at her like one blinded.

"And for all this what will you ask of me?"

She lifted her proud head and looked down straight into his eyes.

"Of you I shall purchase—my freedom and his life."

His mouth quivered with rage as he laughed aloud once more.

"So-so! Ah, the wildness of women's passions! You would buy your lover at *that* cost? Oh, fool! you who once were subtle and wise as the serpent!"

Her teeth set tight, but she kept down her wrath.

"Profit by my folly," she said, briefly. "Take all I have—leave me only him."

The first words were stern; over the three last her voice unconsciously softened with an infinite pathos and yearning.

That involuntary thrill of longing tenderness steeled him in an instant to the first eager impulse of acceptance, prompted by his lust for wealth and ease and power, and all the half barbaric voluptuous royalties of the Roumelian palace that had seethed in him for so long. Other evil instincts were more potent still than avarice. He smiled, a slow and cruel smile.

"Magnificent ransom for a landless courier. But at what price will not your sex gratify its caprices—especially the caprices of the passions! Your lover should know the sacrifices you would make for his embrace! For myself, the bribe is high; but I decline it."

The blood faded from her face, even from her lips; a gray, heavy shadow, as of desperation, fell over her, that seemed to drain the very color from her eyes and from her form, and leave her, white and chill there, as a statue.

"What will you gain?"—she spoke with a hard, brief, stony tranquillity.

"Why—a romantic thing to be sure, and an unremunerative; yet the sweetest thing, as men find, that the world holds—vengeance."

"Neither he nor I have wronged you."

"May be. But both have galled me; both——"

"Been wronged by you. True. I forgot the reason of your hate."

His face flushed darkly.

"I do not bear *you* hate. I tried to free you. But I swear this man shall not wed with you, and live."

"And why? Have you not done us injury enough? You poisoned my life with infamy, and would have taken

his in a thief's slaughter. Can you not let us be? Can you not sell yourself for pity's sake, as you have so often sold yourself for shameful things? Take my bribe. Impoverish me as you will; enjoy all I have to give; seize all you have ever coveted; bind it fast to you on what terms you choose; make me poor as the poorest that ever asked my charity, only leave me this one thing, his life."

She spoke still with the same strange enforced serenity, but beneath it there ran an intense melancholy, an intense yearning; they could not move, but steeled him in, his purpose.

"The thing I will *not* leave you," he said, savagely. "Ah! I know how men go mad for that beauty of yours; he would hold himself rich as emperors were that his own, though you had no other gold than just what gleams in the coil of your hair. I know, I know! And so you can love at last, my queen!—all that ransom for one wild mountaineer! But you shall only ransom him one way, Miladi; only by—forsaking him."

"I will never forsake him."

"So! Then his wedding night will be his last."

Her hand worked with a fierce, rapid, clinching movement on the butt of the pistol.

"Wait," she said, slowly, while each word fell on the silence like the falling of the great slow drops of a storm. "You threaten him? One word from me, and he will give you over to justice for your crime to him. One shot this moment from me, and he will be here to take his vengeance."

He shrank slightly, for cowardice was ingrained in him; but he knew how to deal with the brave and generous nature of the woman whom he tortured. He looked her full in the eyes.

"True. You might send me to the galleys. But you will not."

Her lips parted, her breast heaved, a great shudder shook her. She answered nothing.

"You can summon your lover," he pursued, after a pause. "You can tell him of my 'crime,' and—also of my tie to you. You can see us fall on each other, and fight as tigers fight. You can wed him in peace if he kill

me; as most like he will, since he is so far the stronger. You can do this. But you will not?"

From the depths of her agonized eyes a flash like fire passed over him.

"I *cannot!* You know it."

He laughed slightly.

"No. I did not know it. Women soon vanquish scruples and tread out memories to gratify a passion. Well, since you hesitate so far, perhaps you will hesitate yet further. You will not break your oath by betraying me; will you betray this one man whom you say you 'honor,' by linking him, in his good faith and his ignorance, with *us?*"

She gave a sharp, quick breath, as though a blow were struck her.

"God forbid! I have said, all bonds between me and the past are severed forever."

"I see! You will lock the book, and throw it aside, and your blind worshiper will credit on your telling that the pages were all pure blanks! And yet—I thought you said you 'honored' him?"

All the haughty, fiery blood in her flushed to life under the subtle sneer.

"I do so; from my soul. Let his name be. It has no place on your lips—yours—that gave the word to murder him."

"Fine phrases! And yet you will deceive him?"

"I!"

"Yes, you, Miladi. You will not betray me to him—you cannot. So—telling him nothing—you will leave him ignorant. And one fine day, were I to let you run your passion's course, he would learn the truth, and find his sovereign, his idol, his mistress, his wife, my——"

"Wait! You have said enough!"

"No. I say more. Forsake him, and he is safe from me. Give yourself to him, and I will add him his marriage-gift—death. Just such a death as he would have dealt me on the Bosphorus shore. I can see the gleam of his steel, and the thirst of his eyes, now!"

"If he had killed you, what would he have done more than justice?"

"At least he would have rendered you inestimable service, Miladi!"

She stopped him with an irrepressible gesture.

"Hush, hush! Oh, God! such words between *us*."

"Well! We are enemies; bitter ones enough."

"Yes; enemies as the wronged and the wrong-doer ever are. But your life is sacred to me; how can you curse mine?"

"Mine sacred to you? Is it so, Idalia? Then—being so, you will not betray me to your lover?"

She turned on him a look that had a weariness, a scorn, an agony, a pity unutterable.

"No! I must bear the burden of your guilt."

"But you will betray him by leaving him in ignorance of whom he loves—of whom he weds?"

"Though he knew *he* would find mercy and greatness enough to pardon."

She spoke not to him, but to the memories that rose before her—memories that filled her heart with their bitterness and their sweetness—memories of the exhaustless faith and patience and forgiveness of the man she was bidden to abandon.

"Truly! Then what think you, Miladi? Is it a noble return to cheat him as you meditate? Is it a fine thing to recognize this limitless tenderness borne you, only to dupe it through its own sublime insanity? You have fooled such idolaters scores of times, I know, only—here I think you said you 'honored' him? Which makes a difference; or might make it."

She knew well how wide the difference was—wide as between innocence and guilt.

She answered nothing; her face was gray and stern as stone, only in the brooding horror of the deep dilated eyes was there reply; they spoke more than any language of the lips.

The Greek laughed softly.

"His bridal couch made in the nest of his 'assassins!' His stainless and glorified mistress proved the masker of the Silver Ivy! Madame, I think I might let his passion run untroubled, and leave my vengeance to the future—some future when he should reach the truth from some

chance word, from some side-wind—and hear the secret that a woman who 'honored' him never told all through the days and nights she lived in his sight and slept upon his heart. Hear it when he was bound to her beyond escape, and could gain no freedom through knowing her traitress to him as to all others. Ah! I am not so certain that I will not let you wed him. It will be a surer stab to him than comes from steel—that one truth learned *too late.*"

There was a long silence.

She shuddered from head to foot, as though the scorch of a red-hot brand passed over and marked her; then an intense stillness fell upon her—a stillness in which all life seemed frozen in her, and every breath to cease. He waited, mute and patient now.

At last she raised her head, and turned it full upon him; as the reddened glow of sunrise flickered on it, it was dark, and cold, and resolute, with an exceeding strength and an absolute despair.

"For once you have shown me duty, and saved me from a crime. My hand shall not touch his again."

"Because you will not——"

"Because your guilt is on me."

"And yet you are willing to lose all your riches, and your power, and your victories, and your pleasures, for this one man?"

"I am so willing."

"Then it is——"

"That you have shown me what would be my sin to him. You cannot be betrayed. He shall not be."

"You mean——"

She turned on him ere he could speak with the swift, lithe, terrible grace of a stag hunted and hounded into a fierceness born of sheer torture, and wholly alien to its nature.

"Silence! or I shall forget what you are, and let him take his vengeance on you. Can you not be content? You led me into cruelty and error a thousand times under the masking of fair colors and of fearless aims; you now show me, in the one redemption of my life—the one purer, better, higher thing!—only an added guilt, a fresh dishonor. I lose *all* through you. Are you not content?"

The vivid passion, the agonized irony, died suddenly, as a flame drops to the ground; her head fell, her limbs sank wearily on the broken rocks, a full dead apathy returned on her, in which she lost all memory, even of his presence. He looked at her, hushed, awed, moved to something that was almost dread of his own work, intimidated by the suddenness and the completeness of his own victory; he waited, hesitating, and as one afraid, some moments; she gave no sign that she even remembered he was near; every second wasted might cost them both the loss of liberty, if not of life; but he lacked the boldness that could have pressed on her then the question of mere bodily danger, the mere physical perils from the cell and the rods of her persecutors.

There was that in her attitude, as she sat bowed, motionless, with the loosened weight of her hair sweeping down into the salt pools of the beach, and an icy chillness of calm on the colorless immutability of her features, that subdued, and shamed, and had a nameless terror for him.

Some sense of reluctant reverential fear was always on him for the woman whom, nevertheless, he had goaded and trepanned, and injured, and tortured through the length of many years. Some touch of love for her ever lingered in him.

He paused a long while, at some distance from her, while the incoming tide rolled nearer and nearer up over the shingle and the sand, till the surf washed over her feet. She never noted it; her eyes, without sight in them, gazed at the dusky changing mass of water that here and there beneath the spell of waking light broke into melting lustrous hues, like the gleam of colors on a southern bird's bright throat.

He drew closer, with a doubtful hesitation.

"You will come with me, then?"

She gave no sign even that she heard the words.

"I am not alone," he pursued. "Lousada, Veni, and the boy Berto sought you. I fell in with them as I neared here; they are fugitives, and proscribed themselves; they lie hid by day in an old sea-den of Veni's; they look to get away by the coast in a night or so; they would give their bodies to shot and saber to save your hand from a rough touch. Will you come to them?"

He could not tell whether she heeded him; he saw her face in profile; it was still, cold, passionless, stern with a mute intolerable suffering, like some Greek head in stone of Destiny.

He felt a restless fear of his own victory.

He spoke afresh, rather to break that death-like silence, filled only with the ebbing and the flowing of the sea, than for the sake of what he uttered.

"Veni's sea-nest is safe—safe, at least, for a little while; it lies yonder, through there, where a passage-way pierces the rocks. All that acanthus hides the entrance. It has sheltered many before; Fiesoli lay there once, in the first days of his proscription. Lousada doubts little that he can get a brig from Salerno, and steal away off westward three nights hence. It is the best chance. You will come?"

At last she lifted her head, and looked at him.

"But for Giulio Villaflor I would go—far sooner—back to the dungeon of Taverna."

His face paled; he knew her meaning—knew the unspeakable loathing and scorn of himself that made the severities of captivity and wretchedness look fairer in her sight than every recovered freedom shared with his companionship.

"There is no other alternative," he said, sullenly. "You will come?"

"I will come."

He was once more victorious; and once more with victory stole over him a strange chill dread, as he who has brought down and netted the lioness of the plains will feel something of awe, something of fear, when in his toils lies the daughter, the mate, the mother of free-born kings of untrodden soil—when beneath the rain of his blows, and from out the meshes of his trap, the great fearless luminous leonine eyes look at him, suffering but unquailing.

"Why do you wait, then?" he asked.

"I wait—for him."

"So! You will, after all, be false to one of us. Which?"

"Neither."

"What gage have I of that?"

"That I have said it."

He was silent a moment; he scarcely dared dispute that single bond, her word. Traitor himself to her, he knew that his treachery would never be repaid him by its own coin.

"You wait for him?" he said. "Then so also do I."

"Are you weary of the shame of your life that you seek to lose it?"

"No. But he shall take it rather than I will leave you here."

Through the calm upon her face, the calm of martyrdom, of despair, he saw the conflict of many passions, of infinite misery.

"Will you choose for us to meet?"

Where her forehead rested on her hands that were thrust among the masses of her hair, the great dews started as they had never done when the scourge was lifted at Taverna.

"We shall not part alive," he pursued. "Perhaps you count on that? Your lover is the younger and the stronger; there are few men he would not worst. You rode all day through the heat and press of a battle under Verona once, I remember; may be you wish to see a life-and-death contest."

She answered nothing; a shiver as of intense cold ran through her.

"You can enjoy your new passion, true, if he kill me; —a dead body flung with a kick into that surf, the waves to wash it seaward, none on earth to care enough for me to ask where I have drifted,—it would be easy work. Is that the reason why you 'wait'?"

"God! how can you link such guilt with me, even in thought?"

"Why not? That will *be* the end if we meet in your sight to-day, unless, indeed, fate turns the other way, and your lover falls through me. Sit there, Miladi, and watch the struggle; you will never have seen two harder foes. Turn your thumb downward, like those dainty, haughty Roman dames you copy in philosophies and seductions; turn it down for the slaughter-signal, if you see me at his mercy. How free you will be then! But—listen just a little—if he press me too close, we have not the northern scorn of a timely thrust, and it will be but in self-defense!"

As he spoke, he drew gently half out of its sheath the blade of a delicate knife that was thrust in his waistband, and let the beams of the sunrise play brightly on the narrow shining steel.

The glitter flashed close beside her. It sent fire and life like an electric shock through all the icy stillness of her limbs; she rose with a convulsive force; her eyes had the gleam of an opium-drinker's in them, her voice had scarce a likeness of itself.

"I come, I come; do what you will with me, so that his life escapes you!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"UNTO HIS LAST."

THE Greek let the slender blade of steel slide back into its case.

"That is well," he said, simply, while the radiance of his conquest played all over his arched lips and his fair brow; then, without other words, he took his way across the stretch of sands, and many yards onward swept back a deep screen of ivy and acanthus that closed the mouth of a fissure in the rocks, and veiled it so darkly that no sign of the break in the great mass of stone was seen. He signed to her to enter; she obeyed him; having once made her election, it was not in her afterward to pause, to waver, to retract; having submitted herself to his power for another's sake, she ceased to protest against that power's use. The screen of matted foliage fell behind her, shutting out the day; before her stretched the gloom of a long narrow arching passage-way, hollowed through the thickness of the cliff, half sea-wrought and half pierced by men. She had come thither once in bygone years when the great pleader, Fiesoli, had hidden there, proscribed for too fearless a defense of a political prisoner; she passed straight onward now through the thick darkness, her hand on her hound's

mane to still his longing rage, her tyrant following in her steps, flushed with the wine of success, yet silenced by a vague and restless disquietude.

The length of the cavern wound like a tangled skein through the depth of stone, no light breaking through it, and the air was chill, and close, and dank, like the air of a tomb; it was cramped and tortuous, and the hard jagged surface of the rock bruised her as she went. Once he stretched out his hand to guide her; she shook it off as though it stung her, and passed on alone, more rapidly, and full as calmly, as though she swept down some sun-lighted terrace among the roses of a golden summer-time.

"She will never *fear!*" he thought; and to the heart of the man that unconquerable courage of a woman brought a sullen impatient wondering veneration. He was a coward—a coward at the mere gleam of steel, at the mere common, vulgar terrors of physical peril; but in her he had never known one pulse of fear. There was a pang of wistful, painful envy in his thoughts for that one greatness which nature gave to her and had denied to him.

At the far end of the vault a fitful ruddy light was gleaming; it came from the flame, now leaping, now sinking, of a fire made of brushwood and the boughs of the maritime pine. Where the fire burned the passage opened out into a wider vault, divided into two or three arched chambers—natural caverns widened and heightened by art, and roughly made, by benches, and skins, and stands of arms, and beds of osiers covered with soldiers' rugs, into a camp-semblance of habitation. A rude place, yet not comfortless, and with a wild beauty of its own, as the flame flashed on the many colors of the riven stone, and the stalactites that hung above broke in the glow into a diamond brilliance—a place that had been once the subterranean way of a great castle, which had long crumbled down to dust upon the cliffs above; then the nest of roving pirates; lastly, the refuge of proscribed revolutionists, of men who suffered for liberty of speech, and were content to perish under the deathly chillness of their country's deepest night, so that through them the dawn might break for others later on. The sea-den was still as a grave, and well-nigh as lonely; only by the pine-logs sat a boy of six-

teen or so, with his fair curls turning to a red gold in their dancing flames, and his beautiful young Rafaelle face drooped pale and weary over them.

It was the lad Berto; left sentinel while his comrades spent the daybreak seeking a vessel down the shore. He was but a child; but he had long put away childish things; years before he had seen two of his brethren fall side by side in an émeute of Milan, and ere then had been borne, in infancy, in a mountain flight in his mother's arms, and had kept as his first memory of life the echo of his own vain cries when her heart grew still under his eager caress, and there flowed from her breast a deep stream like the purple flood that wells forth when the grapes are pressed —for the Papal troops had shot down like a chamois the woman who dared love, and follow, and bear sons to a republican rebel.

He started, and rose with a sentinel's challenge; then, as he saw who came, bowed low; the weary sternness of his fair face never changed in boyish sport, or youthful laughter, or under the light of a girl's shy eyes; wrong had been stamped heavily on him too early, and if in his future life the purity and greatness of high aims should be marred in him by an unchangeable unrelenting chillness, like the chillness of St. Just, the evil would lie with the tyranny which had made the warmth of his rosy mouth die out on the ice of his mother's bosom.

Idalia moved forward to within the circle of the watch-fire, lighted as the sole means they had to illumine the gloom; there was a deadly calmness in the mechanical actions that sent a thrill through the child Berto as he watched her where she sank down on the log covered with a shaggy ox-hide that he had vacated. She seemed unconscious of his presence; and he knew that more than mere physical peril, which he had many a time seen her meet so carelessly, was upon her now.

Phaulcon touched him. "I will look to the fire, Berto; go and sleep. You need it."

"Her Excellency permits?" asked the boy.

He spoke hesitatingly, reverentially; beside the flower-hung waters of Verona he had known this woman, now a homeless fugitive, ride through the heat of conflict and dis-

mount, and gather the spent balls under a raking enfilade, and heap them in her skirts, and mount him on her charger to bear them to the revolutionary brigades, while she stayed on at her dangerous gleaning.

She looked at him pityingly, but there was that in the look which Berto had never seen but once—when a woman of the Northern Isles had toiled wearily, begging her way, into Rome to look once more on her son's face, and had reached in time to see the last earth thrown upon his coffin, while in the fair spring morning the French drums rolled a cruel music through the violet odors of the burial-place, and over the majesty and the shame of the great prostituted city.

"Yes, go," she said, briefly; "you need rest. I will take your watch."

She drew his rifle to her, and leaned her hands upon its mouth.

The boy went obedient; in one of the inner hollows that served as bed-chambers his couch of grass was spread; he had not lain down for three nights, and sleep sealed his eyes as soon as their lids were closed. Across the flame of the pine-logs the Greek watched her irresolute, embarrassed by his own success. It was dark as midnight in the heart of the pierced sea-wall; the play of the rising and falling flames fell irregularly on the gloom; she sat motionless, as she had sat upon the shore, her clapsed hands resting on the slanted rifle, the tawny splendor of the fire cast on the splendor of her face.

She thought no more of him; she thought alone of the man who would return to find her lost once more—the man she must forsake or must betray; whose body she must give to slaughter, or whose soul she must slay by abandonment. She looked down into the fantastic flicker of the resinous boughs as she had looked down into the ripple of the waters; and, as he watched her, the same shame which had moved him for his sins to her, when he had heard of her as within the power of Giulio Villaflor, stirred in her companion; it ever slumbered in him, at times it woke and stung him, yet it never stayed him from his sacrifice of her to the needs of his own craft, the lusts of his own avarice. To serve himself, he had warped and misled the idealic

ambitions, the fearless genius, the poet's fate, the hero's visions, that he had found in her earliest youth; to serve himself, he had taught the keenness of her intellect intrigue, fanned her worship of freedom into recklessness, snared her to evil through the noblest passions that beat in her, taught her to hold her beauty as a mask, a weapon, a lure, a purchase-coin; to serve himself, he had roused her bravery into defiance, her pride into unmerciful scorn, her wit into skeptic cruelty, and—when these were done—went further, and soiled the fairness of her life with the dusky imperishable stain of lip-rumored dishonor, and let the stain rest so that the world saw it as a reality; while she, knowing it false as foul, became too proud, too careless, and too callous to appeal against a world so credulous of evil, so incredulous of good, but took up in the haughty courage of an outraged dignity the outlawry which injustice contumeliously cast to her, and lived and fought, enjoyed and suffered, in grand contempt of all opinion, accepting, as her sentence, the *yo contra todos, y todos contra yo*, until such isolation and such contest became to her things of preference and triumph. He knew that he had done this guilt against her—partly in the cruelty of egotism that profited through her injury, partly in the blindness of partisanship that thought all means justified to secure its end, chiefly, beyond all, in a rankling jealousy of those possessions and that inheritance which had made her so rich in power and in gold, while he was penniless and an adventurer; jealousy that the lavishness of her gift, the generosity of her thought, never tempered, but inflamed. He knew that he had done this, and that of his own act he had turned the tenderness of her heart toward him into abhorrence, had changed the love and the faith she had once borne him into the hatred of a proud woman for her oppressor, of a fearless temper for a coward, of a slandered honor for its traitor and its traducer. He knew that long before, in those bygone years, when he had crowned her young head with the wild laurel-leaves of Livada, and wooed her with subtle words to the Delphian laurels of a perilous strife and a perilous fame, the Greek child had fastened her deep eyes on him as though he were a god, and believed in him as though the voice of Delphos spoke

in his; and he knew that of his own act he had made the woman on whom he looked now, in the dusky ruby heat of the uncertain flame, scorn him with all the force of her imperious intellect, shrink from him with all the abhorrence of a brave nature for a craven's sins, and alone withhold her lips from curses on him as the ruin of her life, because memories that he had outraged had still their sanctity for her—because to the oaths he had broken she yet remained faithful.

It had been wanton destruction he had wrought, it was irrevocable loss he had sustained; some sense of all he had forfeited and killed when he had become her worst traitor, and had made the eyes that once sought his in love cast on him their righteous scorn, smote him heavily and restlessly now, as they sat, with the burning of the watch-fire between them, alone in the cavernous gloom. In the whiteness and the immutability of her face there was a grandeur that awed him; despite the weariness and alteration of fatigue, of fasting, of endurance, it was the stern, noble, disdainful beauty of the Vassalis race that he hated, Greek in its type, Eastern in its calm. He thought of the great palace of the Vassalis stronghold, far eastward, crowning its mighty throne of cedar-covered hills, with the treasures of ages in its innumerable chambers, and its sun-lightened plains rich in vine and olive and date, and watered by a thousand winding streams deep and cool under lentiscus shadows; all that her great race had owned, and over which she had rule.

"If that had been mine—not hers—I would never have harmed her," he thought. "Wealth is the devil of the world."

The intense silence, the night-like darkness on which the white smoke floated mistily with an aromatic scent, were horribly oppressive to him; he had the nervous susceptibilities of a vivacious and womanish nature. He addressed her; she did not reply. He set food and wine beside her; she did not note them; she sat immovable; the intense strain on all physical and mental power brought its reaction; a dull stupor like that of opiates steeped her limbs, her sight, her brain in its lifeless apathy.

He looked at her till he grew sick with the heat of the

flames, with the blackness of the shadows, with the spice of the pine perfume, with dead memories that would come to him do what he would. He rose impetuously; he had been on foot or in saddle many days and nights, eating scantily, sleeping still less; all his frame was aching, and his eyeballs were scorched with want of rest.

"You will not leave here?" he asked her, half imperiously, half hesitatingly, since though he commanded he yet feared her.

"No."

"You give me your word?"

"Yes."

"Then I will go seek for Veni. He should be here ere now."

"Go."

The monosyllables were cold, impassive, unwavering; to her he could be now and hereafter but an assassin, whose crime had been frustrated by hazard, yet could be none the less vile because in its issue foiled. She obeyed him lest a worse thing should come unto the man he had already wronged, but she submitted herself to him in nought else.

He knew that, her promise given, twenty avenues of escape might open to her, and she would still profit by none; he had known her keep her word and redeem her bond at risk and cost that might well have extenuated her abandonment of both. He turned quickly from the watchfire, and went down into the shadow of the farther recesses, whence a steep cramped stairway, cut upward through the rock, led, like the shaft of a mine, into the lowest chambers of the building high above on the crest of the cliff: the bell-tower of the fallen castle, bare and crumbling to ruin, deserted, except when, as now, some fugitive who knew its secret sought its subterranean shelter. The stair was perpendicular and difficult of ascent; he thrust himself slowly up it and into the dull twilight, that by contrast looked clear as noon, of the basement square of the campanile. He had no fear that she would fail her promise, but he had fear—a certain superstitious fear—of that grave, colorless, magnificent face bent above the pine glow; he could not stay longer under the sense that her eyes were on him, under the scourge of her unut-

tered scorn, under the mute reproach that her mere life was to him. He would not loose her to freedom, but he feared her. He breathed more freely when he left the darkness of the cavern for the upper earth; he was fevered and fatigued, and timorous of the danger round them as any long-chased stag; he cast himself down to rest awhile on the thick soft lichens covering the tower stones, close beside the mouth of the shaft, up which every faintest sound from the hollow den below came to him as distinct upon the rarefied air as up the passage of an aural tube.

Alone, by the blazing tumbled heap of pine-wood, her attitude never changed; the light played on the metal of the rifle, in the red-brown of the hound's eyes, on the scarlet and the gold of her soiled and torn mask dress; beyond, on every side, stretched the dense Rembrandt shade of the vault; her eyes, wakeful with a terrible wakefulness that seemed as though it would never again relax and sink to sleep, never stirred from the one spot in the red embers, which they looked at without knowing what they saw

"It is but just," she thought, with that stern, unsparing self-judgment which was strong in her as her disdain was strong for the judgments of the world. "I never paused for any destruction; it is but just that I must destroy the only life I prize."

And as she thought her eyes filled with a great agony; justice on herself it might be, but how unjust upon the guiltless!—upon this man who spent his heart, his honor, his very existence on her, only by her to be betrayed or be forsaken.

Through all the varied dangers of her past, her courage, her genius, her instinct, her prowess had borne her out, even when at loss and with sacrifice, unscathed and unconquered; here at last no one of these availed her, but she was bound, powerless and paralyzed, under the net of circumstances. Before this she had never been vanquished; now she was chained down beyond escape beneath the weight of an intolerable oppression.

The pine-embers glowing crimson on the gray ash dust seemed to stand out like letters of flame—writing of fire

that glowed around upon the blackness of the shadows, and seemed as though it repeated in a thousand shapes the words that had fettered all her life. Words uttered so long ago under the great dim oak glades of Greece, while the stars burned down through the solemn woods, and the moan of classic waters stole through the stillness of the night. Words that she had thought bound her by holy withes to noble thoughts, to sacred aims, to patriot souls, to the ransom of the nations, to the armies of the truth. Words pledged with a child's faith, with a poet's enthusiasm, with a visionary's hope, with the all-belief of youth, and with the glow of ambitions too high for earth, too proud for heaven. Words dictated by lips that she had trusted then as though an angel's bidding spoke by them. Words that while she thought they but allied her to those who suffered the martyrdom of liberators, who fought for the freedom of speech, and creed, and act, and who were banded together for the deliverance of enchained peoples, fettered her, she knew too late, into the power of one man, into the obedience of evil.

She had taken her oath to Conrad Phaulcon and to his cause, while in the splendor of her dreams and the ignorance of her gracious youth she had held the one a stainless patriot, the other a glorified martyrdom; she had been trepanned through the truest beauty of her nature, blinded through the purest desires of her heart. The patriot was a knave, only the more perilous because also a coward; the cause was a lie, only the more perilous because it stole, and draped itself in, the toga of Gracchus, the garb of an eternal truth.

Slowly she had awakened to the sure agony through which all youth passes—the agony of disillusion. Slowly she had awakened to the knowledge that in giving herself to the service of liberty she had delivered herself into an unalterable thraldom; that the guide whom she had followed as she deemed to the fruition of idealized ambitions, and the attainment of a stainless fame, was but a false prophet with a tarnished glory only in his gift, was but an outlawed and necessitous Camorrist, who saw in her beauty, and her talent, and her wide wealth from the vast Eastern fief so many means whereby to enrich himself and to ensnare

all others. And when she had learned it, and felt its bitter falsehood eat into her very soul, he, lest she should break from him, had cast subtilely about her that poisonous film of imputed dishonor which once breathed never passes; he had done it ruthlessly, or rather, let others do it and never said them nay, which served as well. She had been sacrificed, true, but that had been of little account to him, since through it the gold, and the harvests, and the luxury of the Roumelian possessions were shared by him; his name alone, spoken with hers, had cast shadow enough to darken it. Then, when that last evil had been done against her, she had grown hardened to this world, which so easily believed against her; she had grown callous to this outlawry, which was pronounced against her through the errors of another. She was wronged; she did not stoop to appeal or to protest; the bravery of her nature steeled into defiance, the independence of her life accepted willingly an isolation which yet was a sovereignty; she had a wide vengeance in her power, and she took it—with too little mercy.

Those memories thronged on her as they had thronged on her foe in the loneliness of the sea-vault, while that vow of implicit obedience to his will, of unvarying association with his schemes, of eternal silence on his tie to her, and of eternal devotion to the interests of his order, which had many a time aroused in her such passionate and contemptuous rebellion even while she repaid his betrayal by fidelity, now seemed to stand out before her in the fantastic lines of the hot embers.

That oath had coiled about her many a time, had stifled, and bruised, and worn, and stung her beneath all the pleasures of her abundant life, had made her the compelled accomplice of harm she strove to avert, had poisoned those enterprises and those perils which were to her the sweetest savor of her years, had bound her down into an abhorred fealty to a dastard, and had driven her to loathe the sight of those fair hills and stately palaces whose heritage had rendered her the envy of her tyrant. Now it wound round another life than hers. She would have accepted as retributive justice all that could have befallen herself, but here she could not suffer alone.

"How can I save him? How can I save him?" she thought unceasingly; save him not alone from bodily peril and the fruit of his own noble rashness, but from the curse of the love he bore her.

All she could do for him was to save his mortal life; all she could be faithful to him in was to withhold from betraying him. Her nature was strong, and she could have wrung her own heart, burned out her own desires, put away from herself all peace forever without faltering, could she thereby have purchased oblivion and rest for him; but these things were unpurchasable; his suffering through her was irremediable, and to endure this knowledge she had no strength.

Time passed; she sat still there, her hands clasped round the rifle, her head drooped on its mouth, the flames now dying low to darkness, and now upleaping toward the black roof of the quarried rock. Motionless there, with the tawny luster of the fire on her, she looked like a statue of bronze, the outline of that attitude of frozen vitality, of mute despair, thrown out distinct in the hot ruddy light against the darkness of the cavern around. A deadening insensibility stole on her; she thought, and thought, and thought, till thought grew an unmeaning chaos; the lengthened want of sleep brought on her the numbness of death by snowdrift; she heard nothing, saw nothing, knew nothing, till a hand touched her, and a voice was on her ear.

"Oh, God! what horror you gave me! I traced the footsteps on the sands down to the mouth of this den, or else——"

The words died on Erceldoune's lips, arrested there by the look he saw upon her face as it was raised and turned to him. In a breathless, pitiless silence they looked upon each other, the red gleam of the flames between, her head turned back over her shoulder in an intensity of terror that looked the terror of an infinite guilt, her whole frame shuddering from him, her haughty beauty changed into a shamed and shrinking thing of fear. He, who had prayed that the seas might cover him if once her eyes fell beneath his own, read worse than his death-sentence in that look. His arms, that had been stretched out to her,

sank; out of his gaze, that had sought hers in such eager wonder, all the light died; over his face passed the stern, cold, dark agony of doubt.

"You fear me—*you!*"

The words were few, but they bore to her ear a reproach beyond all others—a reproach too noble in its rebuke to quote the thousand claims upon her trust and honor that his acts had gained. They called her to herself—to the one memory left her—that he must be saved. Her head fell—she had not strength to look on him—and she put him backward from her with a piteous gesture.

"I fear *for* you. Go—go—go! This place is death!"

"Your place is mine. Why are you here?"

She answered nothing; she cowered there in the play of the fire's glow, while ever and again her glance sought the gloom of the cavern's recesses as a hunted stag's seek the haunts of the forest whence his hunters may spring. She had said that she would keep truth both to her tyrant and to her savior; she had said that she would never again touch with hers the hand of the man whom her caress would betray; she had no intent but to be faithful to both bonds. But she had not looked for the ordeal of the actual presence, of the visible torture, of him whom she had consented to forsake; she had no courage to face these; she had taken no thought of how to bid him know their divorce was absolute and eternal. She was usurped by the one knowledge of the jeopardy his life was in while near him was the criminal who before had sought it—the criminal she had sworn to screen.

His eyes softened with an infinite yearning as he saw her misery; it was not in him to harbor doubt while pity could be needed; his nature was long suffering and blindly generous; he only remembered that the woman for whom he would have died a thousand deaths was there in her anguish before him—anguish that was for his sake, and was beyond his aid. He forgot all else, with that noble oblivion of a mind that takes no thought for itself. He stooped and strove to lift her up to his embrace.

"Why have you left me? What is it on you? If danger, I share it; if evil, I pardon it."

She drew herself back before his arms could raise her,

and let her head sink lower and lower until her forehead touched his feet;—that dauntless brow that had never bent to monarchs or to prelates, nor drooped beneath threat or before peril.

"As you have loved me, loathe me. Go!"

Leaning over her, he heard the faintly whispered words; he started with a shiver that ran through all his limbs; the memory of the guilt imputed to her rolled back on him, like a great sudden wave of recollection, that broke down beneath it every other thought. "It is a traitress of whom we speak," it had been said to him; it looked the remorse of a traitress that abased her at his feet.

He stood above her, not raising her, not touching her, the unspeakable love and compassion in him straining to contest the doubt that froze his blood, the doubt that still seemed to his loyalty of soul so vile a crime against her. He was silent many moments, while the heavy throbs of his heart beat audibly on the stillness; cast there before him in the hot half-light, all her beauty of form tempted him with remorseless temptation. So that she were his, what matter what else she should be, guilty or guiltless, dishonored or honored, with death or with peace in her kiss, with cruelty or with mercy on her lips? All his soul went out to her in a great cry.

"Oh God! you are mine—you are mine! What do I ask else—or care?"

It was the baser strength of his passion that cried out in those burning words; their fire thrilled her, their echo woke in her; yet with them the force which had never before then failed her revived. Here lay his danger—this danger, born of her own loveliness, that would abase him, and allure him, and destroy him; this danger, which filled her with one instinct alone, the instinct to tear him at all cost from this snake's nest which held his foe, to compel him at all hazards from herself, through whom his destruction came. She rose and locked her hands upon his arm, and pressed him forward out toward the mouth of the cavern.

"Go—go! This place is death for you."

"What!—and you are here?"

The words were stern with the sternness of doubt and of

demand as he drew himself back from her hold, and looked down into her face with a look that had never been in his eyes before when they had gazed on hers. The longing of his heart and the agony of suspicion strove within him against each other.

A smile passed over her face; the smile that is the resignation, the self-irony, of an absolute despair.

"He doubts at last!" she thought. "He can be saved through that."

And she had strength in her to hope from her soul that such doubt might wrong her deeply enough to spare this man some portion of his pang—might make her in his sight loathsome enough to be thrust out from every memory, cursed yet unregretted.

That smile stung him as scorpions sting; he crushed her in his arms, ere she could escape him, in the ferocity of an intense torture.

"You smile at my misery? Are you, then, the thing that they say—the beautiful, pitiless, glorious, infamous temptress, seducing men to your will that they may perish in your work, binding them by their passions that they may die at your bidding? Ah! my love, my love! only look in my eyes as an hour ago, and I will curse myself that I ever asked you such shame; only let your lips touch mine with their sweetness, and the whole world shall call you traitress, but I shall know you truth!"

The impetuous, wild words poured out unchecked, incoherent; he scarcely knew what he uttered, he only knew that the kiss of this woman would outweigh with him the witness of all mankind; they burned deep down into her heart, they brought the subtlety of temptation to her, insidious, sweet, and rank as honey-hidden poison. Her honor broken with one, her past withheld from the other; a bond ruptured, a silence kept; this only done, and the sweetness of liberty and the liberty of love were hers.

But she thrust it from her; here she had no pity for herself, and here she had pity—exhaustless and filled with an unsparing self-reproach—for this man, who out of the very nobility of his soul, the very guilelessness of his trust, fell thus beneath her feet, and hung his life upon her. She had been merciless to others, devoting them to her need,

breaking them through their own weakness, with the unpitying contempt and rigor of intellectual disdain and of sensuous allurement; here she was merciless unto herself; here she bent, and broke, and cast away all her own life without pause or compassion. That which she had done to others she did also to herself.

She unloosed herself from his hold, and looked at him with the cold, unnatural tranquillity which had had its terror even for the Greek.

"Who has called me a traitress?"

His eager eyes burned down with imploring appeal into her own; the ardent fealty that would have disbelieved the voice of Heaven against her glowed through the heavy shadows of pain and dread upon his face.

"A traitor himself—a liar who shall eat his lie in the dust. God forgive me that I uttered the word to you; but you speak to me strangely, you drive me beside myself; —doubt has not touched me against you; I would not soil you with so much as suspicion. Oh! my loved one, your honor was safe with me;—do not think that one shaft of his told, that one moment of belief gave him triumph. He spoke infamy against you, it is true, and I swore to him to bring that infamy to your hearing, but never because it glanced by me as truth, never save only for this—to prove him and brand him in falsehood. You know me; as I love, so I trust, so I honor."

She stayed him with a gesture; she could bear no more. The swift, eloquent, generous words seemed thrust like daggers through her heart. The noble, fearless light of faith upon his face made her blind as with the luster of the noonday sun. This was the man she must forsake forever while their lives should last—this was the love that she must change into eternal scorn of her as of a wanton, murderous, living lie. Her martyrdom grew greater than her strength.

"Who was he?" she asked.

"Victor Vane; your guest, your friend."

"And he said?"

At the name her old superb irony flashed over her face, her old superb wrath gleamed in her glance, her lofty height rose erect as a palm, her eyes met his in all the fullness of

their regard. He needed no other denial of the calumnies attainting her.

"He said?"

"What your look has answered enough."

"No. What does he bring to my charge?"

"Vileness that my lips will never repeat. Half-truths wrung into whole lies, as only such men can wring them. Chiefly—he bade me ask you two things——"

"They were?"

"Who it is that sought my life in the mountains, and what tie a Greek—Conrad Phaulcon—bears to you?"

A change passed over her face, like that change which steals all the living warmth and hue from features that the grayness of death is approaching. He saw it, and his voice came in broken rapid breaths, imperious and imploring.

"Are they one—this Greek and my murderer?"

She answered him nothing; he saw a hot, deep flush rise upward over her face and bosom—the flush of a bitter degradation.

A moan like a wounded animal's broke from him; he could not bear to live and see shame touch her. He stood above her, while the flicker of the fire glowed duskily upon the dilated wondering misery of his eyes.

"Are they one? Answer me!"

She did not answer, nor did her look meet his.

"That man I showed you sleeping is this Greek!"

She held silence still.

"What! You screen him in his crime? What tie has he to you, then?"

Her teeth clinched tight as a vice to keep herself from utterance of the words that rushed to her tongue.

He stared blindly at her; he felt suffocating, drunk, mad; he stood beside this woman, whose every tress of hair he loved, whose mere touch could send the vivid joy like lightning through his veins, and he arraigned her as her judge for having union and collusion with his attempted slaughter!

"What is he to you? Where is he now?" he panted. "You called him your worst foe. Do women shelter their foes' guilt thus? You would not let me take my justice on his life. What is his life to you?"

She looked at him with the rigid calm returned upon her face, impenetrable as a mask of stone.

"I said that there were things that you could never know. This is of them. I have withheld your justice from you; I have known your assassin, and kept the knowledge untold to you. I have erred against you—greatly. Think of me what you will, what you must."

The reply was spoken with a cruel mechanical precision; she moved from him and stooped above the pine-logs, seeking their heat. She felt as she had done when once, in a Livonian winter, the night-snows had overtaken and enshrouded her, and the life had begun to turn to ice in her veins.

Something in the very action bespoke a suffering so mute and so intense that it struck to his heart, still so closed to evil and so open to faith, so slow to give condemnation, so quick to render trust and pity. He threw himself beside her, drawing her hands against his breast, searching her eyes with the longing love, the bewildered incredulity, of his own.

"Think of you! What can I think? You are my mistress, my sovereign, my wife; you take my love and yield me yours; you have smiled in my eyes, and lain in my arms, and spoken of a lifetime passed together; and now—now—it is my murderer who is sacred to you and beloved by you—not I!"

As though the fire of the words stung her into sudden life, she turned swiftly, all the light, and the fever, and the anguish of passion breaking one moment through the frozen tranquillity of her face.

"Not you? Ah! would it were not, my love, my love, my love!"

In the yearning of the accent a tenderness unutterable broke out and burst all bonds; as he heard the darkness passed from his face—a glow like the morning shone there.

"You love me thus! You cannot have betrayed me——"

She stayed him; she knew that this glory of reawakening joy must be quenched in an eternal night.

"Wait. I love you. I cannot lie to you *there*. But

that ends, now and always. I say, you have been sinned against heavily; I must sin also against you—sin without shame by forsaking you, sin with shame by life with you. I choose the least. We are divorced forever. We must be as are the dead to one another. Forgive me, if you can; curse me, if you cannot. Whatever you do, leave me, as though death were in my touch."

All the ardor, and the yearning, and the warmth had passed from her voice; it was sad as despair, and inflexible.

He listened, watching her with a grave wondering pain and pity; he had his own thought of the meaning of her words, and the patience and the belief in him were infinite.

"Though death came by you, do you think that I would leave you?"

The great salt tears sprang into her aching eyes; in her agony she could have set the muzzle of the rifle to her forehead, and died there at his feet. She had a more merciless ordeal—to live and make herself loathsome in his sight.

"No; you would not," she answered him. "But—if dishonor came by me?"

His frame shook with a sudden shudder, but still she could not turn away the enduring tenderness that would not take even her own witness against her.

"You use cruel words," he said, while he stood above her with the dignity of a judge, with a great nobility in the pity of his gaze. "Hear me awhile. I have learnt more of your past to-day; I think that I can imagine what I do not know of it. I think that you have been involved in evil, but through errors that had root in virtues. I think that many have betrayed you and attainted you through the very bravery and generosity of your nature. I think that you have been bound with criminals because you first held them to be patriots, and because your bond was sacred to you even when sworn to worthless men. Do I think aright?"

She heard in silence; her soul went out in honor and adoration of this man, who, out of the truth and the virtue of his own heart, judged and divined her life thus rightly, despite all weight of circumstance, all darkness of

calumny. But she knew that to leave him to think this was to bind her to him for evermore. She knew that he must think else than this ere he would be forced from allegiance to her.

"You think nobly, because you think by the light of your own heart," she said, in her teeth. "But it is not this that you were warned to think to-day! Your counselor was nearer right. Believe him!"

"Were you what he said, you would not tell me that. I judge you thus by the light of your own nature. You speak to me of divorce—of dishonor. You know the coward who attempted my life, and will not render him up to my justice. These are bitter things; yet I can see day through them. It may be that you have fallen among much guilt, and yet are unstained amid corruption. It may be that you shield a crime, because to expose it would be treachery in you. It may be that you elect to forsake me because you cannot reveal to me that full truth of your past which should be one of my marriage-rights. This is how I judge you. If I judge rightly—I said to you that you could not stretch my tenderness further than I would yield it. I say so now; trust only my love, it shall never fail you."

"Oh, God! cease, or you will kill me!"

She swayed forward, and sank down at his feet, her brow and bosom bruised on the cold jagged floor of the cavern; she had exceeding strength, but she had not strength enough to hear those tender words and give them no response; to behold this limitless forgiveness stretched to her, and leave him to think her too callous, too abased, to return to it even gratitude and repentance; to know that, as he judged her, he struck to the very core of fact, and rendered her but sheer and rightful justice, yet that the acceptance of even this justice at his hands was denied her through an alien crime.

He stood above her, the great dew gathering on his forehead; the evidences against her that her accuser had uncoiled one by one in so close a sequence thronged on his memory; her attitude, her misery, her abasement, had so much of guilt in them, yet had so far too much of suffering to be the cruel, wanton, voluntary guilt of such a

woman as her calumniator had declared her to be—to be guilt, sensual, tyrannous, and self-chosen.

He stooped to her, and his voice was so low that it was hardly heard above the beatings of his heart:

"I cannot tell; is it—not justice that you need, but pardon?"

She answered him nothing where she had sunk in that bowed, broken abandonment. The nobler his pardon, the darker was the wrong against him. She could have kissed his feet, and cried out to him for forgiveness, as though her own hand had done that murderous iniquity against him. She could better have borne his curse than she could bear his tenderness.

He touched her; his hand shook like a leaf.

"Is it so? I can bear to know you are human by error; you shall be but dearer to me for the truth with which you redeem it."

She looked at him with a swift sudden movement that raised the full beauty of her face upward in the tawny flame-light; it was colorless, and lined with the marks of the damp stones, and had all its proud glory soiled and dimmed, yet it had the grandeur of an intense sacrifice, of an intense passion, in it.

"Ah, you are just and pitiful as a god! Give no pity, give no justice here. Only leave me—leave me, and never look upon my face again!"

"For what cause?"

"For the cause—that of my people your murderer came."

He looked at her with a terrible incredulity, that was slowly hardening into the stern chill desolation of doubt that he had put from him so long with so leal an allegiance.

"Of your people! You called the Greek to me your deadliest foe?"

She was silent once more; the testimony of half the nations of the earth would have failed to weigh with him against her; but by her own blows the storm-proof fabric of his faith was swaying to its fall.

He laid his hands upon her shoulders, crushing under them the loose masses of her hair.

"First your foe, then your comrade—hated and sheltered—condemned by you, and screened by you. What is he to you, this man for whom you forswear yourself thus?"

She answered nothing; the red shadow of the fire gleamed upon her face, but it was not so dark and so hot as the flush of shame that scorched there. His hands held her like iron. The force of jealousy rose in him; the ferocity of bitter suspicion worked in him; against all witness he had disbelieved every accusation brought to stain her, but he could not disbelieve the meaning of that silence, of that humiliation, of that conscience-stricken abasement.

The patience, so long strained, broke at last.

"They say this brute was once dear to you? Is it true, since you cover his crime so fondly?"

She did not reply; her head was bent so that he could not look upon her countenance, but he could see the heaving of her breast with its rapid, laden breathing.

His hands grasped her with unconscious violence; he knew neither what he did or said; he knew only that she could not meet his eyes, that she could not answer his challenge.

"Is it true?—that you once loved him?"

She bowed her head; a faint, chill, deadly smile crossed her lips one moment, she smiled as men, lying broken on the wheel, have laughed.

A cry loud and hoarse rang from him down the stillness of the vault; he staggered where he stood, and loosed her from his hold, and stretched his arms out mechanically, as though he had grown blind and sought support. The merciless light of certainty seemed to have stricken his sight as lightning strikes it; that hideous assurance of conviction had come on him, against which the mind is at once and forever conscious no appeal is possible.

Had she denied it, by the trustful tenderness of his nature, the evil told against her would have passed, leaving no stain, no shadow even, of mistrust of her; but before that affirmation of her gesture, before that condemnation of her silence, it lay no more with him to choose between belief and disbelief. His faith fell, as a tree must fall when its roots are severed.

"There is one man—one man only—that your mistress ever loved."

The words seemed whispered by a thousand voices that rushed down the empty air; he had been betrayed by her that this criminal might be sheltered from his vengeance!

He knew it; in that horrible hush of stillness that fell between them, his heart stood still, his very life seemed to cease; it was out of her own mouth that he condemned her. His throat rattled, his words burst, scarcely with any human sound in them, from his parching lips.

"What! you kneel there and tell me this thing—you who swore to me that no kiss but mine ever touched you? What? you fooled me with love words that you might lead me off the scent of my vengeance; you turned a living lie to harbor a murderer? Such vileness is not in woman! You a traitress!—a wanton!—a slave of your senses!—a priestess of vice! Oh, God! Say the whole world is false, but not you!"

She held silence still. Her head dropped lower and lower, as though each word of that appeal were a hurled stone that beat her down lower and lower in her abasement.

He forced her upward in his arms with the unwitting violence of suffering, and strained her once more to his embrace, and covered with kisses her lips, her brow, her bosom.

"Say it—say it. Say the world lies and you are true, or—or—I think I shall end your life and mine!"

Her eyes, heavy with the mists of a great misery, fathomless and hopeless like the eyes of the Fates in Greek sculptures, gazed up to his.

"Do you dream *I* would stay your hand? It were best so—so I should be yours yet."

"Mine! What then?—you love me though you are my traitress?"

The word rang in sullen echo down the stillness of the cavern; a hard bitter agony passed over her face.

"One may have guilt and yet have love," she muttered, faintly.

He shuddered as he heard her; in the answer a subtle tempting coiled around him; the perfection of her earthly beauty might be his, though it were but the love of the

wanton wherewith she loved him; the taint on her soul could not steal the fragrance from her lips, the voluptuous light from her eyes, the mortal glory from her loveliness. The baser passions of his soul longed for her, though every evil that swells the sum of human crime had place in her—though through her should come to him sin, and desolation, and dishonor. Yet he was not their slave; the greatness of his nature rose above them, and trampled out their tempting. He put her from his arms lest his strength should fail him, thrust her back from him so that her breath should be no more against his cheek, her heart throb no more on his own.

"Love that is faithless and shameful? What is that to me? If you have wronged my vilest foe, the woman *I* loved is dead."

The sentence in its brevity had a despair deep as death.

Where she stood before him she bowed her head, as beneath words that had the weight of a righteous law. For this—that he rose higher than his passions' tempting, that he strangled the assailants of his senses, that infidelity to his enemy would have been as dark in his sight as infidelity to himself—she honored him with a great reverence.

"Yes. She is dead," she answered him, with a strange dreamy repetition. "Where has she ever lived save in your visions? She is dead—go. Do not wait by her grave."

There was a terrible meaning in the hushed hopeless words; across their calmness a single cry broke—a cry that had in it all the desolation of a ruined life, of a breaking heart.

Then silence fell between them. She had no courage to look upon his face; she dared not read all that she knew was written there.

The drooping flames reached a dry bough of pine, and flared afresh with it, and rose up in a writhing column of light that flashed its ruddy glow into the darkest shadows of the cavern. As the flames darted into luster they shed their hue on the fair head of the Greeek stretched out in all its velvet beauty from the deep gloom of the farther vault. He drew back swiftly, as the tell-tale glare searched for him and fell upon his face.

Before he could reach the shelter of the inner den, the one he had wronged saw him, and, with the leap of a staghound, hurled himself upon him, and dragged him from the depths of the vault forward into the full light of the flames. The slight limbs of the Athenian had no force against the vengeance of the man who saw in him at once his murderer and her paramour; he was torn out from his lair and tossed upward, as a wrecker's hands may toss a beam of driftwood.

Erceldoune forced him downward into the circle of the burning pines, so that full in their light and full in her sight he should take his justice on the wretch who had once struck at his life, and now took far more than life from him. He only knew that this was the man who had sought to assassinate him; that this was the man for whom and to whom she betrayed him. Yet, beyond the memory of his vengeance, beyond the violence of his hatred, beyond the rage of jealousy in his soul, was a terrible pathos of wonder that looked out at her from the reproach of his eyes; it was for a thing so vile as this she had betrayed him; it was for a life so infamous as this that she had given herself to guilt!

Reeling, swaying, striving, they wrestled breast to breast, strangers from the far ends of the earth, yet bound together by the kinships of wrong and of hate, while she, who had cast herself between them, strove to part them—strove to tear them asunder—strove with desperate strength to end their contest. Erceldoune thrust her back, and flung her heavily off him.

"You stayed my hand once—not again. Stand there, and see the felon you harbor die as curs die!"

His face was black and swollen with the lust for blood that she had seen there when he had fought with the Neapolitan Churchman. Wound in one another, they struggled together, seeking each other's lives, with the breath of the flames hot upon them. The Greek's lips were white with fear, but they laughed as he glanced aside at her.

"You love to see men at each other's throats! You love to see tigers play? So, so, Miladi!—then look here."

He slipped loose with a swift, supple movement, and freed his right arm. There was the glisten of steel in the light;

the blade quivered aloft to strike down straight through heart or lung; before it could fall his wrist was caught in a grip that snapped the bone, and, wrenching the knife from his hand, flung it far away into the depths of the cavern, while the sinewy arms of the man he had wronged gathered him fresh into their deadly embrace. The slender southern limbs had no chance, the serpentine suppleness had no avail, the fox-like skill had no power, against the mighty frame and the ruthless will of the avenger who at last had tracked him; a shrill scream broke from him as the steel was twisted from his grasp, the numbness of dread overcame him as he was choked in the arms of his victim, and down into his looked the unbearable fire of the eyes he had left for the carrion-birds to tear. A sickly horror, a fascination of terror, held him breathless and unresisting to the will of his foe; Erceldoune swung him upward, and held him, as though he were a dog, above his head, his own height towering in the glow of the flames.

"Oh, God!" he cried in the blindness of his agony and of his hate. "Is there no death worse than what honest men die for this brute?"

She threw herself on him, she seized the loose folds of his linen dress, she held him so that he had no power to move unless he trod her down beneath his feet.

"Spare him!—for my sake, spare him!"

"For your sake! You dare plead by that plea to me?"

"Oh, Heaven! what matter what I plead by! Give me his life—give me his life."

"The life of a murderer to the prayer of a wanton? A fit gift! Stand back, or I shall kill you with your paramour."

"Wait!—you do not know what you do! I saved your life from him—let that buy his life from you!"

He stood motionless, as though the words paralyzed him; all the tempest of his passions suddenly arrested; all the wild justice of revenge, that had made him strong as lions are strong, turned worthless as at last he grasped its power in his hands. The blow that struck him was memory—the memory of that death-hour when through her hands life had been given back to him.

By that hour he had sworn that she should ask what

she would of him, and receive it. At last she claimed her debt; claimed by it the remission of her sins—claimed by it mercy to the companion of her guilt.

He stood motionless a moment, the leaden night-like shadows heavy as murder on his face and on his soul—then at her feet he dashed the Greek down, unharmed.

"What you ask by my honor—take by your shame."

And, without another look upon her face, he went down through the gloom, and out to the air, to the sea, to the day, ere his strength should fail him, and the stain of blood-guiltiness lie on his hands.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"I GIVE MY BODY FOREVER TO INHERIT PUNISHMENT AND PINE."

CONRAD PHAULCON slowly gathered himself from the ground, faint, blind, staggering from the force with which he had been thrown, and looked on her where she had fallen senseless—her proud head sunk on the gray wood-ashes, her face white with the whiteness of death. He thought her dead: and a mortal dread fell on him, a mortal chillness froze his heart. In his own cruel, tyrannous way he loved her still, and he thought that he had killed her. Moreover, she had been faithful to him. Listening and watching there, he had found that she had kept her bond to him, and had not betrayed him. The evil against her died out from him; a shame that was almost remorse stole on him. Senseless there, like some fair statue shattered down by a hand that stayed not for sake of beauty or of genius, she smote his conscience, all dulled, and crushed, and burnt out though it was. Throughout their lives he had betrayed, and oppressed, and goaded, and dishonored her; throughout them she had done him good for evil, and been true to him against his own untruth. This strength

and this fealty pierced him harder, because of their utter unlikeness to the cowardice and the greed of his own nature.

With hands that trembled, and tears that stood thick in his eyes, he touched her, and sought to revive her; his temper was the temper of a child, and he had a child's fleet facile emotions, a child's wanton cruelty and worthless repentance. Like a child, he could wring his bird's throat without mercy, and weep useless tears when the victim lay cold and huddled in death.

"Idalia—Idalia?" he murmured, softly. He feared the sound of his own voice in that stillness.

After awhile sense returned to her; her lips parted with slow struggling breaths, her veins grew warm, her eyelids quivered and opened heavily to the glare of the resinous flames. She knew him where he bent above her, and lifted herself with a sudden breathless shuddering force.

"Go, go, go! Never dare come again in my sight!"

He lingered, scared and awed by the words and the gesture that were like an imprecation upon him, by the blaze of her eyes as they unclosed, wide and wild, to the tawny light.

"Go, go!" she cried afresh. "You could hear what he deemed me, and hold your peace! Go—there are wrongs gods themselves could not pardon."

He knew it; he turned slowly away, and went from her glance, from her presence.

She rose faintly, and reeling slightly; her eyes dwelt on the black noiseless gloom and the checkered play of the flames, with that gleam, like the gleam of madness, in them, that had had irresistible terror for the man she banished. She stood awhile looking out at the darkness that closed her in, while for all the world without the morning sun was shining. She was like one drunk with alcohol; her brain was stunned, yet her force intensified; the power and the vitality in her were strong almost to ferocity—the ferocity of that unbearable suffering which is in itself a madness. Like some lithe-limbed leopardess, stung to bloodthirstiness by the dastard shot that has struck it from an unseen hand, she passed swiftly across the depths of shadow to the place where the boy Berto lay sleeping still in the intense slumber of long fatigue.

She laid her hand upon him. "Wake."

He did awaken, and sprang wonderingly from his bed of dry sea-grasses.

"Illustrissima! What is there?"

"There is need of you."

"I am ready." The fair, pale, boyish face had the calm keenness of the Napoleonic type. "It is——?"

"Treason."

"Ah!"

His eyes caught the terrible meaning, his mouth the terrible smile, that were on hers.

"Treason—against me; if to me, so to all, so to Italy. A traitor never sins *once*. Go seek Lousada and Veni; seek your brethren, seek any one of our people. They know how to avenge the unpardonable sin. Bid them bring him here; I will give him his sentence."

The boy smiled—the smile of a St. Just.

"He has lived his life," he said, in the old Roman idiom. "His name, Eccellenza?"

She stooped and breathed it on his ear: the name of Victor Vane.

Without word or pause he bowed low, took his rifle, and went on her errand; a child by years, yet already weighted with the weariness and the wisdom of maturity, by reason of the penalty he paid for having let his childish soul brood over the burdens of the peoples, and dream of liberties under the leprous shadow of a dominant priesthood, while other children laughed, and played, and only asked of life that the vine should give fruit, and the sleek herds milk, that their gay feet should ply in the tarantala's measure, and the sweet sun dance in their own bright eyes.

She, left there in solitude, and bound by her word to keep the limits of her den, paced to and fro in the fire-lit darkness in that fierce, futile rebellion with which she had paced the dungeon of the Church. Her eyes were burning, her throat was swollen with long thirst, her teeth were locked like a vice. All sense, thought, volition, seemed scorched up and withered in one intolerable misery, one unalterable shame. One thing alone seemed left to her—her vengeance.

She was of the nature which happiness makes sweet,

rich, generous, as southern sunlight; which calamity renders fearless, strong, and nobly calm beneath all adverse fate; but which wrong and treachery in an instant turn hard, dark, dangerous as the force of iron.

She laughed aloud, in the loneliness.

"He played the traitor!—so! Well, he will learn how we deal with traitors. Fool, fool, fool!"

Then, as that laugh died, the weakness of her bodily frame, the agony of her soul, beat down the false alien strength of bitter passions.

"Oh, my love!" she moaned. "It was for your life, not for mine."

And she sank down amid the gray ashes by the fire that was slowly dying out, with the stupor of exhaustion stealing on her, and her eyes fastened on the gloom beyond, strained, and senseless, and savage with pain, like those of an animal that is chained to a stake for the torture.

To her, there could have been no martyrdom like the martyrdom of undenied dishonor; borne for his sake, and incurred through the fulfilling of her oath.

Without, the boy Berto passed into the white hot glare of day. His errand was perilous; and he knew what Tedeschi rods were like, how Papal steel could thrust; but he had the firm, silent heart that Nature early gives to those whom she will hereafter make leaders among men, and, having a purpose to accomplish, he did it unflinchingly, through to the end. He went swiftly and straightly now over the lonely shore, with the eye of a hawk, with the speed of a greyhound, glancing on every side for those he sought, and going warily, lest he should be seen by the soldiers, whom he knew were out, more or less near, seeking for the proscribed who had escaped them. He ran swiftly, mile on mile; reaching a crest of land, he paused at last for breath. On one side lay the sea, now blue and laughing in the full noonday; on the other, mountain-bounded, the low-lying lands, with their broad sunlit desolate tracks dotted with the herds of swine and grazing buffaloes, with thickets of wild myrtle and green pools of water. There he saw what made him drop suddenly, and hide like a young hare.

What he saw were the barrels of carbines among some acanthus-covered stones that screened a score or so of soldiers, and farther onward the solitary figure of a man in the clothing of the Capri fishers. The soldiers lay close, their heads alone above the fallen blocks of shattered travestine; the tall form of the Capriote, dark and towering against the intense light, came onward, fast, blindly, taking heed of nothing, seeing nothing, in his path, passing straight through the horned cattle as though they were an insect cloud, with his head bare to the heat, and his eyes without sense in them; headlong, as if he were deep in drink, yet with a nameless, terrible madness on him that had as terrible a majesty.

Fascinated by it, the Roman boy watched him as he reeled through the sunlight, while the browsing herds were scattered by the tornado of his course. Others watched him also, as he came nearer and nearer straight across the plain, pausing for no obstacle, breaking through all vegetation, passing like the wind over the width of the country. Then, rapidly as a lasso is thrown, the soldiers sprang upon him as he passed the broken stones; his arms, his limbs, his body, were bound and knotted with cords ere he could cast off one of the score of hands that seized him; fettered, powerless in an instant, with the naked blades flashing round him, he stood like a wild horse netted by Guachos, his mighty muscles panting under the close-drawn bonds, his eyes wide-opened on his captors, red and glaring and senseless. There was no escape possible.

He stood a moment, looking vacantly down on his bowed limbs and the savage wolf-eyes of the soldiery. All consciousness seemed dead in him; he had rushed on through the scorching day, till, had they not arrested him thus, he would have fallen sun-stricken; he was passive from the sheer intoxication of suffering, and he was weak in his body also, for, from a wound on his shoulder, blood was oozing through his shirt. Yet, as he felt the withes on his limbs, he made one bound, like some magnificent forest animal entrapped; he fought against his captors then on the sheer instinct of combat, with his head dropped like a bull of Aragon when it charges to give to the torreador the fatal blow of the *cogida*, and with his firm white teeth, the only

weapon left him, clinched hard and fast at the throat of the soldier nearest him.

For some minutes there was a struggle that made even the bold veins of the Roman boy run chill—weakened, hampered, jammed, powerless as the captive was, he had terror for his assailants, as the bull when its black hide is steeped scarlet with gore, and its flanks are transfixed with the lance-heads, carries death for picador and banderillo still. Then, brute force conquered; the hirelings of Francis were scarce better than brigands, and courage awakened no homage in them. When they fell away a little from each other, and the dust of the parched plain that had risen in clouds above the scene of the conflict sank, they had pulled him down as with a lasso—he was stretched there on the short burnt turf, his eyes distended, his mouth filled with sand, his limbs lashed fast with cords.

To them he was but a Capri boatman, a thing of the people, a scum of the sea, a rebel on whose life a good price was set, an animal to be thrust to the shambles, how roughly mattered little so that out of his heart they should cut that which they sought to know.

They heaved him up, with a kick, by the ropes they had passed round his waist and under his shoulders; they loosened a little the cords binding his ankles, and bade him stand, holding a carbine at his head; then they fastened him by his belt to two of the strongest-built of their band, and, with bayonets fixed in his rear, drove him on in their center as the Aragon bull is driven on at the point of the lance from pasture to circus.

So they took their way through the white breadth of the sunlight over the brown lonely plains, with their prisoner set in their midst. He had never spoken once.

The child Berto rose slowly from his hiding-place in the low myrtle-bushes; many a time his hand had been on his rifle to send a message of death through these wolves of the Apennines who wore the king's livery, and dishonored the title of soldier; as many times he had paused, knowing that one shot could avail nothing, and that, were it fired, he would only share the captivity of the man whom he sought to release. As his slight girlish frame rose up out of the leafy screen and against the sunny blue of the sky,

his teeth were set tight, his pale features had grown like marble.

"They go to take him to their captain;—they will make him tell where her refuge is. If he will not tell, they have rods, they have the water-torture—drop, drop, drop, ah! till one is mad!" he muttered aloud, in his breathless rage. He knew nothing of this stranger, save that he guessed him by his dress to be the sailor whom he had heard had rescued her from Taverna—in the cavern his sleep had been too profound to awake to any distant sound—but the sight of the conflict and the capture alone sufficed to rouse all the revolutionary and patriotic soul that was in him. He wrung his hands as he watched the soldiers move over the plain, growing dark and distant as some far-off troop of buffalo.

"Ah, the brigands! the assassins! And I could not fire a bullet for him!" he cried, in his solitude. "Miladi must know of it. She can say whether he will bear the scourge and be silent. If I had thought he would speak, I would have shot him dead before they could have got him. Almost I wish I had. It had been surer."

For the Roman lad knew the means—passing the strength of humanity to endure—by which men who were mute against royal or priestly will were made to find voice in that fair dominion of Naples.

"She must know," he mused;—waited an instant, then with the speed of a lapwing, once having the swell of the hillocks between him and the soldiery, he retraced his way over the lowlands to whence he came, until out of the laughing brilliancy of the noon-sun he came into the darkness of the cave, which now was only lightened by the low flicker of the expiring pine-flames.

Her attitude had never changed. There was that in it, as she sat beside the great heap of silvered ashes and of burnt-out wood, that struck the boy's heart with a sudden awe and fear. The abasement, the subjection, of a fearless life has ever in it a certain terror—the mournful terror of every fallen greatness—for those who look upon it.

He went softly to her, and spoke low in her ear before she saw him by her.

"Eccellenza, the soldiery are out."

She gave no sign that she heard him.

"The soldiers have him! Can you trust him, Illustrissima?"

She still seemed to hear nothing where her gaze was fixed upon the dying fire. The boy touched her timidly.

"The king's people have him, Miladi. Will he be true?"

She started, as though some corpse had been galvanized to life, and turned her face to him.

"True? Will who be true? He whom all are false to? Yes, true to death—true to death!"

He saw that her mind wandered, that she had not aright understood him.

"Eccellenza, hear me," he said, softly. "The soldiers have made that friend of yours their prisoner."

A cry broke from her that woke all the echoes of the cave, and thrilled the lad with its piteous wail; she sprang to her feet, convulsed to passionate energy, to fresh existence.

"Prisoner? The king's prisoner?—*he!*"

The boy's voice sank to a whisper; he had not thought it would move her thus; he knew she was well used to send men out to die.

"They took him on the shore there, by the ruins; they caught a brave man like a snared wolf, the cowards! He fought—gods! how he fought; but they threw him like a bull in the lasso. Will he keep silence, think you?"

"*Will he?* He will keep silence till they lay him mute in death. Ah! God reward you that you came to tell me! Keep silence? He would perish by a thousand tortures ere ever he would betray his darkest foe!"

She knew nothing that she uttered as the words poured from her lips; she put the wondering child aside, and swept across the vault to the chill dense shadow where the Greek had crouched; she stood before him ere he had seen her move.

"I break my word to you. I go from here."

"Go!"—he rose dizzily; the violence of his fall had stupefied him. "Go! Not where I do not follow."

"Follow, if you will."

"Where, then?"

"To the soldiers of Francis."

She laughed aloud as she spoke—the laugh of a breaking heart; she knew that the cowardice of his nature would no more let him pass out where she went than if gates of adamant opposed him. He was startled and bewildered; he felt tenfold fear of her as she stood there in the shadows before him, with that despair on her face and that laugh on her lips; he had thought her dead or dying; a superstitious hesitation held him afraid and irresolute.

"Wait—wait," he said, stretching his hands out to hold her. "What is it you dream of? What mad thing would you do?"

"Save the life you and I have sent out to destruction."

Before he could arrest her she had passed him, and was far out beyond the watch-fire, and lost in the gloom of the entrance passage; her hand was on the boy Berto's shoulder, and thrust him out down the tortuous passage, swiftly and silently up to the open air. When once more the darkness lay behind her, and on her face was the breath of the morning, she bent to him.

"Which way?"

He pointed to the northward, looking with wistful anxiety in her face.

"Miladi, what is it you will do?"

"My duty—late in the day."

The hound had followed at her side; she stooped and kissed his forehead, then sent him from her back into the shelter of the cavern, reluctant, yet obedient.

"Will you not need him?" the boy asked.

"No. Even a dog's life is too noble to perish for mine. See you to him, and cherish him for my sake."

"I! I go with you, Eccellenza."

"No—go rather on the errand I gave you."

"But——"

"Hush! I have said—none go with me. And—for that you came and told me this thing—may the beauty of life rest with you ever, my child."

She passed her hands softly over his fair curls, with the glow of the morning fallen full on her eyes, and the brightness of the sea lying before her.

Then as rapidly and silently as a shadow passes she went from him on her fatal way.

Over the heavy, rugged ground the soldiers forced their prisoner, with his arms lashed behind him, and the carbines held at his temples. They were a dozen men under a corporal, scouts sent out by the commandant of the gendarmerie scouring the shore; low scoundrels who had been thieves ere they donned the king's uniform, and would be brigands when they had doffed it. So that they dragged him to their captain, and compelled him to tell what they sought from him, they heeded nothing beyond. His bound feet stumbled over the rough declivities, his chest was stifled under the crossed cords till he could barely breathe; with every jerked step that his guards took over the roughness of the ground their shot might be lodged in his brain; the red ants disturbed in their hills, swarmed up his limbs and clung there; the open wound of his shoulder was cut by the tight-drawn ropes; still he said not one word, but went on in their midst, with his bloodshot eyes staring out at earth and sky yet seeing nothing, and with a heavy, sullen, murderous darkness on his face and on his soul.

Of physical suffering he was insensible; the deadness of despair had numbed in him all corporeal consciousness. There had only survived in him the mere mechanical brute instincts of defense and of resistance. Beaten in these, he resigned himself, passively, dumbly; too vast a ruin had fallen on his life for him to heed what befell his body. So far as thought still was distinct to him, so far as any ray of it pierced the blackness of desolation in which every memory save one was lost, he wished that they would strike him dead upon the plain they traversed.

They wondered that, cramped and bruised as he was, and strong to ferocity as they had found him, he went with them thus mutely and unresistingly; they did not note the keen, hard, ravenous, longing look, as of one starving at sight of food, that his eyes ever and again cast upon the steel tubes of the slanted carbines that carried death and oblivion so near, and yet denied them to him.

Beyond this he knew nothing; he was dragged over the low-lying country at a pace as swift as the heat of the day and the unevenness of the uncertain paths would allow;

whether he had force to bear it, in the sultry noontide of summer, they never heeded. If he had fallen, they would have pulled him on still, as best they might, with his head striking the stones. He knew nothing; the sunlight was like the blaze of fire ever about him; the hard, hot skies seemed to glitter as brass; water, mountain, the darkness of myrtle, the rush of wild birds, the blue gleam of the sea, the brown baked earth beneath his feet, these were all blurred, shapeless shadows to him, while his eyes looked out, straight onward, with the red, dusky, mastiff flame in them that made his guards mutter among themselves that this man was mad, and should be shot like a mad dog.

And they judged right: he was mad, with the Othello madness that believes what it adores dishonored.

At last their march paused; the silence was broken by the noise of loosened tongues; there were stir, and tumult, and the clash of arms around them; they had joined their comrades, they had brought their prisoner to their captain to be judged. Under some mighty pillars of yellow travestine, the lonely relics of some forgotten temple, four or five score of black-browed, loose-harnessed soldiers, the worst of a worthless army, were scattered, lying full length in the shade, taking their noonday meal, or slaking their thirst at a sluggish noxious streamlet stealing by the columns' base among the violet roots. They had been checked a moment in their search by the sea for the fugitives; and lay like hot, panting, ferocious dogs, ready to rise and use their teeth at a moment's tempting.

They swarmed round him like a pack of wolves, but no change came on his face; with a hundred soldiers round him, lean, savage, ruffianly, for the most part, as any Abruzzian banditti, with the glitter of their steel, the muzzles of their carbines, the yelling of their oaths, the clamor of their triumph about him where he stood powerless in their midst, they could not tell that he even saw them there. His eyes never glanced to them; they looked still, straightly, sightlessly, to the low line where sea touched sky; there was no consciousness in them, but there was that reddened light that stilled their riot of exultation with a vague sense of danger in this chained man standing so calmly in their hostile crowd.

They fell back as their commander, told of the capture, came from the nook of shadow, where, with his subaltern, he had been at rest apart. He was little more than a *guerillero*—a coarse, rough, careless, Calabrian-born filibuster.

He glanced over the captive brought him, in whom he, like his men, saw but a fisher of Capri.

"A fine animal," he muttered, as he glanced over a paper of instructions, comparing the details there with the personal appearance of his prisoner. "So! you are the sacrilegious scoundrel who broke into the monastery of Taverna, and used foul violence against the august person of his sacred grace Villaflor?"

"I am."

Erceldoune answered mechanically; his tongue clove to his mouth; his voice was hoarse and savage.

"Basta! you are in haste to be hanged!" swore the Calabrian, half disappointed at an avowal which left him no excuse for the ingenuity of threat and torture. "Since you confess yourself guilty, go further, and tell us—what have you done with the bona roba you stole from her prison?"

The word struck like the stroke of lightning.

Life, sense, shame, grief, rage, rushed over his hearer with a torrent's force; the foam gathered on his lips; he strained for a moment like a fettered lion at his bonds;—then he was still as with the stillness of death.

"Speak—where is she?"

He made no answer.

"Have you no tongue? We will make you find it, and use it. Tell me—quick!—where is this woman hidden?"

His vengeance was in his hands; one word, one gesture only, to where the sea-cave lay, and his wrongs would be avenged, without the lifting of his hand.

"Speak out," hissed the soldier, whose rage was rising. "Where is this empress democrat? Where does she hide? She knew how to use that buffalo strength of yours; but she will fool you, once she be free. We know what Miladi is! Give her to us; and you may save yourself a necklace of hemp mayhap?"

There was still no answer to him; the great dark eyes

of his captive looked out, far beyond him, far beyond all around them, with a dry, vacant, senseless agony in them that never changed.

"Has the sorceress put a spell on you?" swore the Calabrian. "Look you—you are safe to go to the gallows. Corpo di Christo!—it will be odds if his Grace do not think a quick twitch of the noose too gentle a punishment for you: Monsignore has a long arm and a heavy hand! You are a fine animal—it were a pity all that sinew should rot in quick-lime; we will get your life saved somehow, if you put us this minute on the track of your mistress?"

He might never have spoken for aught by which he could tell that he was heard. The threat that his body would be given to slaughter had little import to the man in whom all life, save the mere breath of existence, had already been slain by worse than a thousand deaths.

"Have you no voice?" yelled the commander, infuriated that his unwonted offer of mercy met no response. "We will find a way to make you speak, with your will or against it! Once for all—will you show us where this woman is sheltered?"

"No."

The Calabrian gnashed his glittering teeth.

"*Altro!* You defy us, you hound? We will see how long that obstinacy lasts. I have license to deal with you as I see fit; to string you up by the throat to that column if I judge it right in the need of my service. We will soon make you find voice, you dog of a rebel! Here! take him, and lash him to that pillar; there in the full sun."

He was already bound fast, in cords that crossed and recrossed, and left him scarce liberty to draw the air through his lungs; it was an easy matter to fasten him to the shaft of the shattered column that stood in the glare of the noon, unshaded even by a branch or a coil of ivy.

"Strip his shoulders, and let the gnats find him out," laughed the Calabrian, moving away to finish his meal and take a mid-day slumber. "We will see if they and his thirst do not make him give tongue."

He was obeyed.

They stripped the linen from his chest and shoulders, and left him, lashed with cords to the travestine in the fullest force of the vertical rays; his wound uncovered, and his head bare. At his feet ran the half-dry brook. They went themselves into the shadow, and lay laughing, swearing, mocking, taunting, chanting obscene songs, and holding up to him in the distance the wine cans they had drained.

The insults passed by Erceldoune unnoted, the jeers unheard; in the desolation of his life they were known no more than the sting of an insect is felt by one whom the smoke and flame of a burning pile is consuming.

Yet they had chained him to a martyrdom.

The intense heat poured upon his brain; the scorching light quivered about him; his veins swelled till it seemed, with every fresh pulse of the blood, they must burst; the innumerable winged insects, humming through the summer hours, attracted one by another, settled on his naked breast, and thrust their antennæ into the bruised skin, and pierced their stings into the opening of the wound. He could not free his hands to brush one of them away. His throat was dry as leather; his tongue was swollen and black; his thirst was unbearable; and at his feet the shallow water stole, to madden him with the murmur of the cool ripples he could not touch. The moments were as hours; the minutes as years. The earth, the air, the sky, were as one vast furnace that inclosed him; where the jagged and beating nerves had been laid open by the hatchet stroke, the buzzing gnats alit, and clove, and stung, and feasted. Weaklier men would have had the mercy of insensibility;—with him the vital strength, the indestructible force of life within him, kept every nerve and every sense strung to their keenest under the torture.

Yet when they came to him ever and again and asked him if he would speak at last, his silence remained unbroken. He was faithful to those who had betrayed him.

He could receive release, as he could take vengeance, by the utterance of one word. He could deliver over his assassin to justice, and unloose his traitress to the doom that waited her, by the same sign that should free him from this slow excruciating death. He could cease to suffer, and be-

come the just accuser of those by whom he was destroyed. He could sever his bonds, and divide those whose guilty union was a worse agony to him than it lay in the power of his torturers to deal. His own fate and theirs rested in his choice.

And he bore his martyrdom and kept silence. The supreme hour of his passion had come to him and tempted him, and found him strong. The purity of his honor would not let him take a traitorous shame even against those who dealt him treachery; the great love in him could not forsake her utterly, although itself forsaken and betrayed.

The bond of his word was as religion to him still; and in his sight, though fallen, lost, dishonored, she still was sacred.

So far as thought could come to him in his agony, his thought was still to save her.

And he hung there, bound by the waist, with the blaze of the sun in his blind eyes and on his throbbing brain, and the clouds of the booming circling gossamer wings growing darker and larger as his tormentors swarmed down to fasten upon him.

One of the soldiers, whom he had heavily bruised in the struggle for his capture, came out of the shade and dipped a wooden cup in the brook, and held it just beyond the reach of his lips.

"Speak, and you shall have drink!"

His throat was baked like burnt clay, his mouth was full of dust, his tongue was cloven to his teeth; he longed for water with the death-thirst of the desert.

The Italian reached and touched his beard with the rim of the cup, so that the coolness of the draught mocked him close.

"Will you speak?"

He faintly moved his head in denial.

The soldier laughed with taunting mirth, and shook the water from the bowl out on to the herbage at his feet: he knew that every wasted drop would be an added pang.

Still he never spoke.

They left him again to the Tantalus torture. He had his freedom in his own choice; in the utterance of one word; and he let them do their worst upon him rather

than turn traitor to the woman whom he held his traitress.

They came and grouped about the pillar, and looked up in his face again with riotous laughter and foul-mouthed outrage at him in his defenselessness. The brazen sky burned above in pitiless fire; the smiling cruelty of the salt sea mocked him with its tossing sunlit freshness; the red ants were slowly climbing the base of the column, scenting blood, and swarming upward to fasten on him; through the air the first mosquito winged its way, herald of troops to come.

"Will you answer now?" asked the chief.

He turned his aching, scorching eyes on them, while his mouth could scarcely whisper the reply:

"No!"

The Calabrian flung himself round on his men in the rear.

"Take him down, and scourge him till you cut the truth out of his heart!"

They were like a herd of Pyrenean dogs; the sight of prey roused all their ravenous instincts. Men tasting once the power and the pleasure of torture rarely pause till they lose their sport to the king-player, Death.

They unbound him from the column, and fastened him afresh to a low block of stone, stripped to the waist, so that his chest and back should be left undefended for the curling thongs of the lash; his face was set still seaward, so that the fair breadth of the free waters mocked him with its liberty. His head hung heavily downward; throes of pain like the scorching of fire throbbed through his wounded flesh, the rushing of pent-up blood filled his lungs, his brain, his ears, his throat to suffocation. There was a pause of some moments; they were weaving together some cords and some leathern belts into the thing they needed. The chief sauntered near him once more, and looked at him doubtingly; he knew the Capri mariners could be dogged in brainless obstinacy as any Capri mule, but he saw that this man's endurance was far more than the mere mute, contumacious persistence of a sullen ignorance. He struck away, half compassionately, a gnat that was alighting on his prisoner's bare breast.

"You are too fine a brute to be cut in pieces with the lash. Look you, they have tough arms, have my men; they will make their belts lay your lungs open if you keep silent. Do you know how the leather can eat a man's flesh?"

He bent his head in assent; in Russia he had seen a serf die under the scourge.

"You do? Well, that grand frame of yours will not spare you; they will mash it to pulp. Will you not speak —now?"

"I have answered."

"You are a fool and a madman!" swore the Calabrian. "You lose your life for a worthless woman."

A spasm that the bodily torture had never brought there passed over his captive's face. He kept silence still.

The Italian shrugged his shoulders, and strolled away.

There was a moment's longer pause, then two soldiers came to their work; they had the whips that they had made, with the heavy buckles at the end of the belts serving as the leaden points with which the lash is commonly weighted. The blows would fall from either side as the strokes of the woodman's hatchet fall on a tree. The rest of the band closed round in a semicircle, their commandant slightly in advance.

Then—then only—as he saw the scourges in their hands, and knew the indignity that approached him, the mute calm of his endurance, the apathy of that desolation of the heart in which all bodily suffering passes as naught, changed and broke. All the fire of his nature, all the pride of his race, all the dignity of his manhood, flashed to sudden life; he never spoke, he was bound, motionless, but he raised his head and looked them full in the eyes, with all the haughty passion of his fearless blood once more aflame. It was but one look; his arm could not avenge him, nor his strength resist the outrage; yet before it they paused and quailed. For the instant they stood irresolute, cowed by the challenge of his unshrinking leonine regard; then, savage at their own sense of shame, they threw themselves forward, the metal-weighted thongs swirled round their heads, gathering full force to curl around him like a serpent's folds; the watching soldiery drew deep noiseless

breaths in silence, the hot hushed air of noon had not a sound upon it; he stood erect to his full height, the courage of the soul victorious over the torture of the body; before the uplifted hands could fall, a single word echoed down through the stillness—"Wait!"

The scourgers paused; the chief swung round to see who dared bid his men's obedience halt; into their startled crowd came the woman they sought. Against the glitter of the sea and the brown desolation of the plains, they saw Idalia.

From the captive they had bound a long bitter cry rang —a cry that the lash would not have forced from him, though it should have cut his heart in twain.

Breathless as a long-chased stag, she pressed her way to him and fell at his feet, and strove with both hands to wrench apart the knots that held him, and looked upward at his face with the dumb agony of the brute's. The Calabrian seized her, and drew her back; he knew her but by name, and her face was strange to him.

"Woman!—how dare you? Who are you?"

"I am Idalia Vassalis. Take me—bind me—scourge me. But let the guiltless go."

The rough mountaineer looked at her amazed, awed, dazzled, doubting his own senses.

"You are the Countess Vassalis?" he echoed, slowly.

There in her mask robes, with the gold all soiled and blackened, the scarlet aflame against the sun, breathless, worn, exhausted, yet with such command in her eyes, with such misery on her face, with such majesty in her glance, she moved him to fear as the sight of Cleopatra, captive, would have moved a Latin boor of the cohorts.

"Yes, yes, yes! Are there no men here who can swear to me? I am the rebel you seek. Take me; do what you will with me; deliver me up to your masters—but free that man who is innocent!"

The Calabrian shaded his eyes with his hand; he felt giddy before her.

"Is it she?" he whispered a comrade.

"It is she," said a Lombard from the ranks. "I saw her before Verona; my shot killed a horse under her."

She turned her head to the soldier.

"I thank you for your witness. Now—do your duty. Bind me, and free your prisoner."

"Free him! So!—he has as much guilt as you."

"He has no guilt. You tortured him to discover me;—now that I yield myself to you, what plea have you to hold him longer? Unloose him, I say; fasten me there in his stead; use those thongs upon me; it will not be the first time you scourge a woman. Take him down, and bind me there in his place by every justice in earth and heaven!"

Erceldoune's voice crossed her own, husky and forced with difficulty from his swollen, parching throat.

"Do not heed her. She speaks only to save me——"

The Calabrian laughed coarsely.

"Ah! This fine Capriote dog, is he your love toy, then, 'llustrissima?"

"He is my victim. May not that better release him?" The coarse outrage had no power to wound her; she had no consciousness except of the man who, for her sake, was bound in the cruel scorching noonday well-nigh to the pangs of a crucifixion. "Is he to suffer for those who have wronged him? He does so when he suffers for me. If I be your enemy, I am tenfold his; will not that quell your rage against him? I have ruined him; that should give him grace in your sight. From first to last he has been wronged by me. Plundered, wounded, left for dead by those who were of my people; used by me, forsaken by me, driven to peril and bondage by me—has he not more to hate me for than you? In the nobility of his heart he shields me still, because he once has pledged me shelter, because his honor still is greater even than his immeasurable wrongs; but he does so only because he is above even his own just vengeance, only because he will not purchase freedom even at cost of lives that are his curse."

She sank down at his feet once more; she strove to rend his bonds asunder;—he seemed to her great as never man were great in that silent martyrdom, endured for those who had betrayed him. He looked down on her, doubting his own senses, doubting that the burning of the sun made him, in delirium, dream the words he heard, the face he saw.

"Free him!" she cried aloud, with that ferocity of unbear-

able misery which makes the gentlest savage. "What plea have you to hold him? I am here; I surrender to you. Take me to king or priest, as you choose; give me only his liberty for mine!"

Instinctively his heart went out to save her; his consciousness awakened through the feverish mists of pain enough to know that remorse flung her here to perish for him, enough by unconsidered impulse to seek to save her still.

"Do not heed her, I say," his lips breathed hoarsely. "She only speaks to spare me——"

"Ho!" laughed the Calabrian, "how you quarrel for the kiss of the lash! Now we have you we will keep you—both."

She turned on him with her old imperious command:

"You will not dare to take his life! He is of England—not of Italy. Such things as he has done against your king and your laws he has done never for himself, only at my instance——"

"A likely tale, to screen your fellow-rebels, Miladi! Tell it to more credulous hearers——"

"You think that *I* speak falsely?"

For the moment the old glorious challenge of her disdainful pride beamed from her face; they who saw it, thought, despite themselves, that if this woman were not above a lie, then never truth was uttered in this world.

"It is no matter how you speak," the Italian made her answer; "you are my prisoners. I shall but give you over to those who will judge you."

"Give me, then. Am I not here that you may do your worst with me? But by all justice, all mercy, all pity, leave him free!"

"It is impossible!"

She threw herself before him; she let her fallen hair bathe his feet, she poured out the vivid utterances of an eloquence that none ever heard unmoved, she sued to him as never for herself would she have sued an emperor; for the only time in her life she abased herself to supplication—she to whom the praying of such a prayer was worse than the endurance of any chastisement.

The Calabrian heard her, startled, dazzled, shaken, but he would not yield.

"It is too late," he said, abruptly. "Miladi, why did you not think before what serving you might cost to a brave man? You treated him like a dog: well, he must die a dog's death. The blame of it is not *mine*."

There was a certain pathos in the words; he was brave enough himself to honor the courage he had so mercilessly tried; her head sank as though the rebuke of Deity spoke by the rough soldier's mouth; she crouched, with a low moan like a stricken animal's, at the foot of the column where Erceldoune was bound.

He turned on her his strained and aching eyes.

"Why have you so much mercy on my body?"

There was an infinite reproach in the infinite patience of the wondering words. Why had she who had slain his soul, his spirit, his hope, all in him that made the living of his life of any peace, of any worth, thus had mercy on the mere torture of limb and nerve and sinew? Why did she who had been so pitiless, so wanton in her cruelty, feel compassion and contrition before the coarse, indifferent doom of merely physical pain?

The Calabrian looked at them in silence, then motioned to his men.

"Take them from the sun-glare, and bind them together."

In a sense he felt pity, because he felt the homage of courage to courage, for this man whom he had seen so loyal at such awful cost; but for her he had no emotion, save dread of her as a sorceress, save wrath against her for one whose fell temptations had been so fatal and so ruthless.

She made no resistance; she never felt the grating of the leathern thongs upon her wrists; she had lost all consciousness of personal suffering; she had come to deliver up her life for his, and the sacrifice was given too late; she had no knowledge left her save this, no heed for whatsoever they might do to her, though she had given herself back to a worse captivity than the prison of the grave. As the leash with which the soldiers coupled them like hounds was pulled tighter, drawing her wrists together, and upward where she was sunk on the parched turf at his feet, her hand touched his; he shuddered as he had never done when the mosquito had thrust its sting into his unshielded breast.

She felt rather than saw that mute agony of the bound, defenseless, powerless limbs; it passed through her in tenfold bitterness. This man, who had held himself unworthy to touch but the hem of her garment, who had deemed himself blessed as with the gift of gods if her eyes but dwelt with a smile on his, now shrank from the contact of her hand as from pollution, from iniquity.

"Take me away," she moaned wearily. "Would you chain him to his murderess?"

They hesitated, and looked toward their chief.

"Leave me, and take him down!" she said, with that vibration in her voice that scared them like startled sheep. "He dies there, and you have not mercy enough even to lift him up one drop of water, even to thrust away one sting that fastens on him. He is dying, I say. If you are men, and not fiends, unloose him!"

They had been as fiends in their sport; the southern cruelty that will rend a bird's wings from its body, or a butterfly's dainty beauty asunder, laughing softly all the while, had been awakened in them; they were loath to quit its indulgence.

He looked as though she said aright, and that he was dying lashed there to the column; his eyes were blood-red, his mouth open and swollen, his forehead purple with suffused blood; his heart beat visibly, great slow labored throbs, under the cords: he was fast losing consciousness.

She wrenched herself from their hold, and caught the wooden cup the soldier had cast down and filled it with the water of the stagnant stream, and held it upward to his lips; he quivered from head to foot, and shrank from the draught that through the parching heat he had been athirst for with so deadly a longing.

"Do not torture me—more!"

The whisper was almost inarticulate from his dry stiffened lips; the cup fell from her hold. She knew his meaning; she remembered the memory which made the thirst that he endured less torture than that action from her hand. She turned passionately on the nearest soldiers.

"Show some human mercy! Bind me there in his stead, tear me limb from limb as children tear the fire-flies; it will be rarer pastime for you to put a woman to torment!

You know what manner of thing is justice? Then if you do, by every law of justice make me suffer, and spare him."

Under their drooping lids, his eyes lightened a moment with a gleam of consciousness: his instinct was still for her defense.

"Let me be. So best," he said faintly. "It will soon end."

She was worthless, she had so declared herself; she was his traitress and another's paramour; yet the loyalty in him survived still—still to lay his life down for her had its sweetness to him.

A shrill wailing cry broke from her like that of some creature perishing in the trough of waves or under billowy flames.

"O Christ! have you no pity? Take him down while there is breath in him, and bind me there in his stead. I will never bid you spare *me* one pang!"

They looked doubtfully at their chief; he signed them to obey her.

"She says justly; it is she who ought to suffer. Loose him, and bring him out of the sun."

They unloosened the knotted cords that swathed his limbs to the column; when they were wholly unfastened he swayed forward, his head fell on his breast, his body bent like a reed, there was foam upon his beard, and his eyes were closed.

A great stillness came then upon the soldiery about the place; through them, under their breath, they whispered that their work was done—that he was dead.

She alone thought not as they thought, that his sacrifice for her was crowned by the last sacrifice of all.

"He is not dead," she said, simply.

There was a strange calmness and certainty in the words that thrilled through those who heard them; they looked at her, neither touching nor opposing her; she had terror for them—terror for them as of some great, fallen, half-shameful, and half-glorious thing. Every intense passion carries its reaction of fear upon those who witness it; hers had such on them now. They dimly felt that if they, in their wanton cruelty, had been the actual murderers of this

man, she knew herself far more utterly his destroyer than they could be, who had but harmed his mortal form.

"He is not dead," she said, with that vibration of an exquisite joy crossing the icy desolation of despair, which smote the most callous there to some vague sense of unswerving pain;—as though her voice reached him, he raised himself slightly, where two soldiers held up his sinking frame, his lips gasped for breath, his eyes unclosed to the dazzling gleam of the day, he stood erect, while a loud cry broke from him:

"O God!—I *cannot* die!"

The English words missed the listening southern ears; she alone knew the agony in them of the great imperishable strength that would not let life leave him, that would survive all which strove to slay it—survive to keep sensation, memory, knowledge in him, and to refuse the only mercy he could ever know, the mercy of oblivion and annihilation.

The Calabrian, who had ordered him this torture, looked softened, and went and laid his hand upon his prisoner's shoulder.

"You are a fine brute. I am sorry you provoked us. See here—this woman is the guiltier: she says so: she is come to suffer in your stead."

He heard, though all his senses still were dim—though earth, and sea, and sky, and the ring of the armed men, and her face in the white furnace-heat of the sunlight were all one misty blaze of color to him. He heard, and his lips moved faintly.

"She shall not suffer—for me."

So far as thought could be clear to him, he thought that, having sinned so deeply against him, remorse at the last had struck her, and drawn her to bear witness for him; he thought that there yet dwelt in her too much still of native courage, of inborn nobility, to let her rest in safety and security, while through her sin, and to give her freedom, he endured the doom to which she had cast him out; he thought that, so far, she was true to herself, though false with worse than a Delilah's treachery to him. To take vengeance upon her was a poor, vain, wretched quittance that never glanced by him; a grossness, a baseness that

could have no place with him; his great tortured passion could no more have slaked itself in such a payment than it could have wreaked its wrong by the bruising and the marring of that mere loveliness of form which had been the lure and instrument of his destruction.

The Italian swore a heavy oath.

"Are you mad? Why, of her own testimony she has been your ruin!"

He saw his captive's breast heave with a mute, tearless, convulsed sob, that no corporeal torment had ever wrung from him.

"Of a woman's compassion she says it—out of her own mouth you would not condemn her?"

It was the sole denial, the sole evasion of the truth that ever his voice had spoken. To save himself, he would not have borrowed the faintest likeness of a lie; but in the dizzy mists of his reeling senses, in the exhaustion of intense pain, this one instinct remained with him—to save her even from herself, to screen her even from the justice that would avenge him.

As she heard, where she stood bound, held back by the guards who had seized her, her eyes met his across the breadth that was between them, of hard, hot, white, cruel light;—guilty or guiltless, faithful or faithless, by that look he knew that she loved him as no woman will love twice.

His head sank, his eyelids closed, he shivered in the scorching day. She loved him, or she had not come thither—she loved him, or never that language had burned for him in her glance. But this love—love of the traitress, of the voluptuous betrayer, of the temptress of sin, of the "queen of evil, lady of lust"—what was this to him?

He could have better borne to see her lie dead at his feet.

Some touch of veneration for the courage they had witnessed, for the self-sacrifice they vaguely understood, had come upon the brigands round him—brigands in their coarseness, their training, and their brutality, though they wore the livery of a monarchy. They had seen that this man could hold his own in contest with the strength, and the rage, and the prolonged resistance of lions; they saw

now that he could suffer and submit with the mute-enduring patient self-surrender and self-command of those saints of whom the priests had told them, in their boyhood, dim, pathetic, ancient legends, half forgot and half remembered. They yielded him a certain, reluctant, wondering homage, and they brought him, with more gentle usage, where the thickly woven olive and acanthus made a shadow from the sun, and gave him water to slake his burning throat, and drew the linen folds of his dress over his wounded chest with what was, for them, almost tenderness. To her they had no such pity; they knew her a revolutionist, a rebel, an infidel—as they were told, a woman of evil, murderous, and fearful sorcery, who could revenge with the *jettatura* all those who incensed her by resisting her seductions; they hated her with a great sullen hate, the stronger, because it was the barbarous hatred that is born of fear; but for their commander they would have shot her down with a volley from their carbines, that those fatal eyes might gaze on them no more with the glance that they believed could wither them like a sorceress's incantation. They bound her arms behind her with ruthless severity, till her fair skin was lacerated and bruised; then they forced her down on to the yellow grasses that grew lank and long among the fallen temple-stones, and passed the ropes that bound her round a block of travestine: from the moment that she had asked for his deliverance, she had never spoken.

He was so near her that, stretching her hand out had she been free, she could have touched him where they had laid him down; his pain-racked limbs were stiff and motionless; he could not have stirred one step to save his life; his frame was racked with cramp, and the virus from the insects' teeth seemed to eat like vitriol into his flesh; his face was buried in the grasses as his forehead rested on his arm; he could not bear to look upon her; he could not bear to feel her gaze was on him. To the watching eyes of the soldiers about them, to the certainty of captivity, or worse, that waited them they were both unconscious; all that either knew was that presence of the other, which surpassed any martyrdom to which military and priestly power could ever bring them.

There was silence for some time around; the chief of

the scanty troop had sent the fleetest runner among them northward for orders from the one who, with the warrant of his Grace of Villaflor, had the direction of his search and the disposition of his prisoners. He was uncertain what to do, and whither to take them; in a thing of so much moment he feared to move rashly or wrongly: the people were inflamed moreover, the times were rife with unrest and sedition, the mouths of the populace were whispering tales that made the national blood burn hot against the Bourbon; he feared a riot—even it might be a rescue—if he bore this woman, to whom his superstition gave such spells, and to whom the revolutionists gave such homage, in the full noonday captive toward Naples.

An hour heavily passed by; round them the soldiers were couched, panting, in the heat, but with their look watchful as a dog's, and their cocked carbines slanted toward those they guarded. Where they had fastened her she sat with her head bowed down, and her eyes, that burned like fire under their swollen aching lids, fastened on him where he lay; he never stirred, but every now and then a great shudder shook his whole frame, though he never lifted his face from where it rested on his arms, though his limbs felt dead as with the numbness of Arctic frost. Fettered, she sat and looked on him—this man, who had thought no evil thing could ever come to him, once having gained the treasure of her love. He had lost all actual knowledge that she was near, in the exhaustion that had succeeded to the long strain on every nerve and fiber. Delirious teeming fancies swam before his brain even in that lethargy of worn-out powers; in them he had no sense of the reality of her presence beside him, but in visions he believed he beheld her, the priestess of passion and pain, the goddess of darkness and of the spells of the senses, whom no man shall worship and live.

The messenger returned. The answering command was whispered by him to his officer. There was noise and movement and haste and delay around them under the shadow of the aged silver olive-trees. Neither knew nor heeded it. Fate had wrought its worst on them.

The soldiers brought a long low wagon, taken from a homestead some way in the interior, oxen-drawn, and com-

monly used to bear the load of millet-sheaves at harvest, or the piles of purple fruit at vintage time. They half dragged, half lifted him upon the straw within it—with a kindly gentleness still, for they pitied him insomuch as he had fallen beneath her power, they honored him insomuch as their uttermost ingenuity of torture had failed to wring from him one moan or oath; and they roughly motioned her to a place beside him, a superstitious terror of her keeping their hands from touching, and their tongues from offering her insult. She stooped over him where he lay, half senseless, on the strewn cornstalks.

"O Heaven! how you suffer!"

The darkness of his eyes, humid and lusterless, gleamed on her a moment under his half-closed lids; he turned with restless fever on the straw.

"You think *this* pains?"

CHAPTER XXXV.

"I WOULD HAVE GIVEN MY SOUL FOR THIS!"

THE oxen toiled laboriously on their wearisome way; the wagon jolted on its large unpainted wheels; the soldiers marched on either side, and in the van and rear: the tawny leathern covering flapped idly to and fro, while about it clung a faint sweet fragrance from grass crops and vine-loads carried through many changing seasons of the earth.

Where they went she had no knowledge; they had bound her eyes; that the noon in time passed and the cooler day followed she could tell by some diminution in the intensity of heat, and by the tender music of birds' throats that every now and then broke out from myrtle thickets and lemon-gardens that they wended their way through as the hours advanced. The measured march of the men, and of the heavy tread of the cattle, at intervals paused; then she heard the muttering of voices, and some

change in their guards' position round the wagon, as though uneasiness or insecurity was prevalent among the scanty troop. Time seemed endless; but she knew that she might easily err in its reckoning, for the oxen moved with great tardiness, and neither man nor beast could press on with any swiftness till the sun had sunk lower. At her feet Erceldoune lay motionless; she could not see or touch him, she would listen for each sigh and catch of the painful breath he drew through his aching chest. The exhaustion which had succeeded to the torment he had undergone still lasted; a feverish lethargy held him almost insensible; he was conscious of some unrest, of some added pang when the uneven rugged roadway shook the laboring wagon, and then he turned wearily on the straw beneath him, but to greater sensibility he never roused. They had screened him from the heat with some broken boughs, and had laid some wetted linen on the excoriated skin that their blows had bruised, and the gnats had stung;—the soldiers compassionated him as the prey of the "evil eye." At times, from the weakness that had followed on the ordeal he had endured, his breathing and the pulsations of his heart were so low that neither could be detected by her eager ear; she could not tell whether life had ceased or not, and her own heart stood still with a fear that no jeopardy of her own life had ever roused in her. And yet—what would existence, if it lingered in him, be to him! Only existence—dragged out at the galley-oar amid the companionship of felons. Or,—even if his country and his friends gained freedom for him,—only one unending misery through his memory, through his loss, of her.

In her despair she strained at the cords that bound her, and bent toward him, though her hand could not reach nor her lips touch his.

"Speak to me!—for pity's sake, speak to me!" There was no reply; her voice had ceased to have power to rouse him.

"Can you not hear me?" she murmured to him, as that horrible stillness froze her blood. "Oh, by the love you have borne me, hear one word, one word only—I have never betrayed you!"

There was no answer still; sunk in that lifeless languor

even these words—that came too late—had not the spell to wake him. His bodily suffering had conquered his bodily strength at last; he was stretched like a felled tree at her feet, and had nor sight, nor hearing, nor any knowledge of her presence near.

The escort moved on, on its weary route.

Through the darkness and the stillness round her the sounds of the declining day, that was still bright upon the world, came with strange distinctness. The song of a child's voice on the air; the noise of a water-wheel in a stream; the slow droning notes of monastic bells; the laughter of vinedressers among the budding vines; the mournful chant of a requiem as a village funeral passed with the crucifix borne aloft; a thousand murmurs of sweet sunlit idyllic life, came on the stillness with a jarring cruelty through the ceaseless tread of the soldiers' feet, and the slow creaking of the reluctant wheels.

At length they paused finally. The sun by this was sinking low westward. The Calabrian in command touched, and bade her descend. She drew back: "Where he goes, I go."

She spoke, not with the supplication of a woman who loved, to rest near what she loved, but rather with the entreaty of remorse to share the victim's fate, with the demand of a leader to endure whatever fell to the lot of one who too loyally obeyed such leadership. The soldier laughed noisily:

"Oh, yes! you shall have your lover, 'llustrissima. Come!—or it will be worse for him."

She obeyed, obliged to be content with such a promise, lest the threat against him should be borne out. Her eyes were still bound from the light. She heard them lift him down from his bed of straw. She thought they bore him after her, as heavy steps followed in her rear; and a heavy hand thrust her forward down long stone passage-ways. Where they had brought her was a large granary, or group of store-houses, very lonely, and built strongly in early days when the ungathered grain had to be not seldom defended with a fierce struggle from the raids of foreign hands that fought their quarrels out upon Italian soil. The building was two-storied, and the vast barn-like cham-

bers were of stone, with slender windows barred with rusty iron, and with a faint dreamy odor in them from sheaves of millet stored there, and from a quantity of the boughs of the sweet myrtle, which had been cut away to lay clear the stems of olives to the air.

They cut the cord that bound her hands, and left her just within the door as they closed it, and drew the bolts without.

She tore down the bandage that covered her eyes, and saw that they had played her false. In the darkened room she stood alone.

For many hours afterward time was a blank to her.

Whether sleep succeeded to the exhaustion, the endurance, and the sleepless toil of the past days and nights, or whether she again lost consciousness, and lay as in a trance, she never knew. The irresistible reaction that follows on overwrought excitation came on her. The worn-out limbs and the strained nerves succumbed to it, and it stole upward at length to the brain, and deadened it to all sentient life, to all remembrance, to all thought.

When she awakened, she was lying, thrown forward on the heap of dying myrtle. All was intensely still; through the slit of the casement the midnight stars were shining, and the hooting of an owl came wailingly on the stillness.

Her first memory was of him. Her first action was to arise and look out on the night. A beautiful country lay in the pallor of the young moon's rays; she knew the landscape well; it was but few leagues from Naples. Below, under some great trees of olive and of lemon, two sentinels were pacing with their carbines slanted; except for their measured tread there was no sound. The place was lonely and deserted; the out-building among maze-fields and olive-slopes belonging to the Crown. She looked; then went back to the couch of withering myrtle, and sought to make her thoughts grow clear; and the manifold hazards and remembrances of her past became of use in her extremity. But the task was beyond her strength. She was fasting—she was devoured with thirst—she was conquered by physical fatigue—she could see, hear, remember, nothing but the face of the man who had been willing to perish for her sake,—the gallant beauty bound

to the stone-shaft, mutilated, bruised, agonized,—the voice which yet amid all that torture gave her no reproach more bitter than that one rebuke—"Why have you so much mercy on my body?" She loved him with the voluptuous warmth of southern passion; but she loved him also with that power of self-negation which would have made her accept any doom for herself, could she thereby have released him to freedom and to peace. Her pride of nature, her imperial ambitions, her habit of dominion, and her desire of homage, had given her long a superb egotism, even while she had been ever willing to give all she owned for the furtherance of lofty aims. But now all heed of herself was killed in her; on her own fate she never cast a thought of pity. She had played a great game, won many casts in it, and lost the last. That was but the see-saw of life. But he—for his loyalty he perished; for his nobility he suffered as felons suffer; by the very greatness of his faith he was betrayed; by the very purity of his sacrifice he was lost forever.

Time crept darkly on. The odor of the myrtles was like the mournful fragrance from flowers strewn upon a coffin. From below, the monotonous tread of the slow regular steps sounded faintly; in the gloom bats flew to and fro, and an owl, who had her nest among the rafters, flittered in and out through the bars of the unglazed casement, seeking and bringing food for her callow brood. The silence was unbroken; the darkness very heavy, and filled with a stealing, sickening sense of unseen life, as rat and lizard darted over the stones, and the downy wings of the night-birds brushed the air; she felt as though she should lose reason itself in that horrible stillness, that fettered misery, that impotent inaction.

Amid all, there came on her a strange dreamy wonder how the life of the world was passing. For twelve days she had been as dead as though she had lain in her tomb. When they had seized her at Antina, the time had been pregnant of great things; whether they had been brought forth or strangled in their birth she could not tell. All that had been done among men was a blank to her.

Then all such memories drifted far from her again. One remembrance alone remained—that of the man who suf-

fered his martyrdom for her rather than render up to justice one by whom he believed himself betrayed more foully than the sleeping Sisera slain under the sanctity of the roof-tree. She knew it might well be that never again would they look upon each other's face; that they might drag their lives on asunder, chained apart at the labor of felons, with eternal silence betwixt them, and knowing not even when each other's lives should cease.

It is a horrible knowledge—that one, living, yet will be forever as the dead.

Fear had never touched her; yet now a supernatural terror seemed to glide into her veins. The black shades of the stealing lizards, and the cold touch of the bat's wing as it passed, grew unbearable; the darkness seemed drawing in on her closer and closer; the eyes of the night-birds glowed like flame through the gloom; she uttered a bitter cry, and threw herself against the bars, and shook them with all the force of despair. "Let me see him once, that he may know!" she cried out to the peace of the night. "Oh God! that he may know!"

The cry, though not the words, was heard.

The door was unbolted, and opened. The light of a lamp fell on the floor. The Calabrian entered.

"So! what is it, Miladi?"

He came, careless and ready for a braggart's insolence. She turned her eyes on him, and the look smote him speechless.

"You played me false," she said to him. "Where is he?"

He stammered, then was silent. She dazzled and affrighted him, as her sudden apparition had done in the blaze of the noonday. He thought coarse and evil things against her; he had heard them said, and deemed them true; but in her presence, even to think them seemed a sacrilege.

"Where is he?" she repeated. "Answer me."

"He is near you." He spoke at random; with the flicker of the lamp on the scarlet of her dress, and the gleam of her loose-hanging hair, her beauty looked to him unearthly.

"In this building?"

"Yes. You are both—kept here because—until ——" He stopped confusedly, and bent above the wick of the lamp, as though it needed trimming.

"Until what?"

"Until the king's pleasure," he replied, sullenly.

She came closer to him.

"You are a soldier?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Well, then, brave men are commonly pitiful. Let me see him for one hour to-night."

He would have laughed out a coarse jest; but as he met her look he dared not.

"Impossible!" he answered. curtly. "No prisoners must commune with each other."

"I know—I know!" she interrupted him. "But gold keys unlock all barriers? I am rich. Name your price. You shall have it if you can give me one hour with him."

"Impossible!" he muttered once more.

"No: possible—if you will do it. What can it harm you? You have both under lock and ward. All I ask is a little speech with him. See—I told you I had wronged him deeply. Can you not think I want his pardon?"

The humility of the words coming from lips so proud, and bending a spirit so indomitable, touched the soldier, who, under a rough rind, had a certain latent kindliness.

"Nay; I would do it for you if I could out of charity," he made answer. "But it is not in my power, I tell you."

"It is in your power, if it be in your will. An hour—a half hour—but a few moments—and you shall have a thousand—five thousand ducats!"

He looked at her stupefied; he was avaricious, like most Italians.

"How can you get them? They will have confiscated all you have?"

"In Italy—yes. But that was little. My wealth lies elsewhere. I will write you an order on Paris, that will give you the sum down in gold.

"You speak truth?"

"Did you ever hear that I spoke any other thing?"

He laughed. "Basta, never. They all say that you lash king and priest with your tongue! Well; I will see what I can do."

He left her; barring her in. She waited in an anguish of dread. She had spoken calmly and briefly to him; but alone, the great veins stood out on her forehead, and her limbs shook with the passion of hope and fear. She would have laid her head down on a scaffold with the breaking of dawn, if to-night she could thereby have purchased the power to say but a single word to the man who believed her his traitress.

Before long the Calabrian returned; he had nothing of the soft grace common to his countrymen; but he had a rough good faith, which, blent with his liking of gold, served her better. He held her an inkhorn and a slip of paper.

"It was a miracle to get these; I sent to the ostiary for them. Write, and you shall see this stricken lion of yours; sure you have wounded him some way worse than ever we did."

She laid the paper on the stone window-sill, and wrote an order for the payment, in Paris, of ten thousand francs in her name to his. He read it with the hesitation of a bad scholar by the feeble oil light; then a laugh spread itself over all his features.

"So! I have a brother, a singer, in Paris, who will serve for this work. It were as much as my life, Miladi, were worth for your name and mine to be seen together. Come! you shall go to your comrade; but, of a surety, rich lips like yours might add one another payment?"

The indignant blood flushed her face; but she restrained the haughty impulse that moved her.

"Brave men do not insult captives who cannot resent," she said, briefly. "I have fulfilled my bond. Fulfill yours."

He hung his head ashamed, and motioned her to pass out before him. There was a short broad stone passage, with a door at the farther end—the great barn-door of another stone chamber. He drew the bars aside, and pushed it open, setting his lamp down within the entrance. "You shall be alone an hour," he said, as he closed the door afresh, and the bolts rolled back into their places.

The oil-fed wick shed but a narrow circle of light beneath it; it did nothing to illumine the impenetrable dark-

ness that lay beyond in the central and distant parts of the corn-room; there was no more sound here than in her own prison-place, the same flitting of gray downy wings, the same gliding murmur of hidden night-awakened insect life. She thought that again the Italian had betrayed her; that she was still in solitude.

But though her eyes could not pierce that dense wall of unlightened shadow that fronted her, such light as came from the lamp—for here the moon did not shine—was cast full about her, and on the dusky scarlet cloud of her draperies. And on the silence a cry rang that startled all the night-birds in their restless flight, circling beneath the rafters. Unseen himself, he saw her, and deemed it a vision of the bitter dreams that swam, as shadows seem to swim on waters, through his aching brain.

He rose slowly from the straw in which he lay, reeling to and fro in his weakness, and came out from the gloom, and faced her—silent.

She looked at him a moment, then fell at his feet as she had fallen when he had been bound beneath his scourgers.

He did not move, nor touch her; his eyes were fastened senselessly upon her; he shivered as though hot iron seared him. "Can you not leave me in peace to suffer?" he cried, wildly. "Off—off—off! What *I* loved is dead! Ay—you tempt me—you bring me her beauty—you would give me her kisses, her passion, her sweetness, her shame. I will not—I will not! What I loved is dead. *I* am faithful!"

All through the hours of the night, dreams of her had mocked, and pursued, and tortured, and assailed him; he was drunk as with the fumes of wine with the burning of the love that still lived; his mind, weakened and delirious, had only been conscious of phantoms that seemed to throng on him, tempting him in a thousand shapes, binding him down the slave of his senses, forcing on him joys torn out from the hell of guilt. "What matter what you be—what matter what death come by you, so you are mine?" The old, old subtlety that has tempted all men from the first hour that they fell by woman, had besieged him through all the lonely watches of the night. Now he

knew not her living presence from the visions of his temptress

In horror she knelt before him.

"Hush! hush! Ah! for heaven's sake, believe my love at least, though it has cursed you!"

He thrust her from him, with the senseless blaze still in his eyes

'Love! Ay, shared with a scare. Love that is poison and infamy; love in my arms to-night, in another's to-morrow! Oh, I know, I know,—it is sweet, and cruel, and rich, and men fall by it and perish through it. But to *me* it were worse than naught. Can you not tell how I loved her?"

The words which had been at first raving and violent, sank at last into an infinite weariness and pathos. Tears rained down her face as she heard them; never had she honored him as she honored him now, when he refused subjection to a vile passion, and held her dead to him because he held her base with the baseness of deliberate and self-chosen vice.

"I can tell!" she murmured "You love as she merits not, nor any woman. Yet,—love further still, and, if you can, forgive!"

He started as the voice thrilled through him, and roused his consciousness of some actual life near him.

"Forgive? forgive?" he answered her. "Do you not know that what men have to pray for, before women like you, is to have the power to *hate?* Forgive? That were sweet as the touch of your kisses! It is to shun, to abhor, to resist you, that strength is needed!"

He was not wholly conscious of her presence; the sense that while she had betrayed she yet had borne him a cruel, worthless, sensual passion had been forced on him even while he had found her sheltering his foe, had been borne out by her own words, even by her outbreak of remorse, as she had pleaded for his life on the seashore: that sense remained with him, and against the weakness in him that made such a love even as this look priceless, strove that nobler instinct which had governed him when he had said to her, "love that is faithless and guilty,—what is that to me?"

He had thought that, for her sake, he should shrink from no crime, that for the guerdon of her beauty there would be no guilt before which he would pause; but even now, in the semi-insanity brought on him by the torment through which he had passed he was truer to himself than this, and the caress of a wanton could never have replaced to him the loss of the "one loyalty, one faith" of his life. He would have defended her and cleaved to her in her extremity; and endured in her stead for sake of the imperishable fidelity he had sworn to her; but it would have been only when the last thing was done and the last sacrifice rendered, to have put her from him for evermore, and never to have looked upon her face again.

She lay at his feet, and heard him thus abjure her power; thus entreat for force to be blind and dead to the allurement of what he deemed the voluptuous visions of his cheated passion; and she honored him as never she had honored any living man; honored the slave, who, because his slavery was shame, broke from it, and became her king by virtue of the very majesty of that rebellion. Snakes had crawled and beasts had crouched in human likeness many a time before her; this man alone stood before her undebased, having rent the withes of base desire, having cleaved to the liberty of an unstained honor.

And her heart went out to him in supplication, remembering alone the wretchedness that through her had fallen on him.

"My God, yes! I have brought you only evil. But hear me once before we part forever. Hear me but once,—you perish by me, but I have no guilt to *you*."

He breathed loud and hard; his eyes stared on her in the dusky light; he took but one sense from her words—that the infidelity of her life had been against others; that though she had lied to him, and beguiled him, and forsaken him, against his rival she had done deeper sin than against himself.

"You love me?" he muttered, as he strove to thrust her back. "Be silent, then—Go, go, go! I have no strength,—if once I pardon, never shall I resist you!"

Pardon! Its softened mercy took the shape of deadliest temptation. It looked sweet as life to forgive;—to for-

give, and steep all wrong, all pain, all hate in one divine oblivion; to forgive, and heed not the pollution of the soul, so only the grace and graciousness of mortal form were his; to forgive, and call sin grace, shame honor, and treachery truth, if so alone the heaven he had lost were his.

She rose up, and faced him, silently awhile; the great slow tears swam before her sight; her tongue was stricken of its fluency; she knew that for her, through her, by her, this man was condemned to a living death; yet that it was not his lost life but her lost purity which was his despair now.

Then she went to him ere he could repulse her, and laid her hands upon his breast, and looked full upward to his eyes: and her voice was low, and had a strange sweetness in it.

"When to-night is over we shall never meet again. The truth may be told now. I have never betrayed you."

A marvelous change passed over his face; the suffering and the darkness, and the haggard desolation on it, were suddenly crossed as with a golden flash of light. He answered her nothing; but his gaze strained down into hers as though it read her soul.

Her hands still leant upon his breast, her eyes still were lifted up to his, her voice had still that sweetness, which was so calm as with the calmness of those from whom all hope has passed, and yet had a yearning piteous passion in it that no words could give.

"We may speak now as the dying do—you and I—we die to-night. To-morrow the living world will have no place for us save a prison and a grave. You perish through me; I have killed you. Your murderess—yes; but never your traitress."

He trembled through all his limbs under her touch and her words; the breath of her lips seemed to toss his life to and fro as the winds play with reeds. His brain reeled. They had said that her voice could steal reason itself from those whom it tempted; they had said that her lie brought a thousand times subtler charm of conviction than the truth of other women ever bare in it; at dawn she had abased herself in guilt before him; now, at midnight, she swore to him that no treachery to him was on her

"Not mine!" he echoed. "When my foe is your paramour, my assassin your care! Silence! silence! They say that you tempt men till they lose all likeness of themselves—all power to see you as you are; but you died to *me* forever when you owned yourself dishonored!"

"Wait! At dawn you gave me your pity!"

"Pity! pity! God! you know what a man's passion is!" he cried to her. "Can it yield that cold, merciful, sinless thing when it consumes itself in hell-fire? Pity! —what pity had you?"

It was the sole reproach he had cast at her.

"Ah! hear me, only hear me! To *you* I had no sin!——"

He gave but one meaning to her answer; a bitter moan broke from him; for an instant his arms touched her to draw her once more to his embrace, then they fell as though nerveless and useless.

"Then—you had sin to another. I have not the strength I thought; I cannot pardon to the uttermost. I would not forsake you; I would not harm you. But the woman *I* loved is dead, I say; do not bring me in mockery of her—a courtesan."

The words were incoherent and faint; but they had an exceeding pathos; the longing, aching melancholy of a life henceforth without one hope. Her very heart seemed to break as she heard them, as they strove after justice and tenderness to her, even amid the havoc of his shattered faith, his unutterable desolation.

"Listen!" she answered him. "I bring you a woman who sinned, if ambition were sin; if too little mercy were sin; if imperious pride and cruel victory were sin; if evil fellowship and enforced sufferance of alien crime were sin; but of all other I am innocent."

His hands fell heavily on her shoulders, in the dim light that flickered on the paleness of her face; his own was wholly in darkness; but through the gloom his eyes burned down upon hers with the glare of wildly-wakening hope straining through the belief—by her own lips—of her guilt.

"Innocent! When you are his mistress!"

"I am not his—nor any man's."

"Ah, God! Take care how you betray me afresh. I am mad, I think, to-night."

"I do not betray you. I have never betrayed. I left you to believe me dishonored, lest worse should come unto you."

"What! when you loved him!"

"I loved him in childhood—yes. Then only."

"In childhood! What are you to him?"

"Wait!—wait! It sickens me to tell! Out of the greatness of your own heart you judged my life—you judged it rightly——"

"What are you to him?"

"To my eternal shame—his daughter!"

Her head was sunk down on the stone floor of the prison-chamber as the words left her, slowly, unwillingly, as though her existence itself were torn and dragged out with them; to the woman who had the pride of an imperial blood, with all the superb insolence of beauty, genius, and power, without their peer, it was humiliation, as deep as to lay bare a felon's brand, to own her kinship with crime and with cowardice, to yield up the secret disgrace of her mighty race.

He—dead to all else—heard but the answer that gave her back to him; doubted not, questioned not, paused not for proof or for dread, but with a great cry—the cry of a heart that was breaking with rapture—stretched out his lacerated arms, and drew her up to his embrace, and crushed her close against his bruised and aching breast.

"God forgive me that ever I believed even your own voice against you! God forgive me that I wronged you!"

His words rang clear and loud, and sweet as clarion's ring in his unutterable joy. Then his head sank, his wounded limbs failed him, ecstasy vanquished his strength as never wretchedness had done; for the first time in all his years of manhood he bowed himself down and wept as women weep, with the agony of passion, with the abandonment of childhood.

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Not until long after were other words uttered between them. The first that were spoken were hers, while the pulse of her heart beat on his, and the low flame of the lamp sunk out slowly.

"What use! what use that you know the truth!" she moaned. "You have been martyred for me. Through me you will perish!"

He smiled, as men smile in some sweet fancy of dreaming sleep.

"Though I may die with the dawn, I can thank God *now* I have lived."

"Lived to be cursed by me!"

"Lived to be loved by you;—it is enough."

"Loved by a love that destroys you! Can you ever forgive?"

"Forgive? What is left to forgive, since you are mine?"

"Yours—for your ruin, your torture, your slaughter! These are the love gifts I bring you!"

"Think not of them! Lift your lips to mine and they are forgotten!"

His thoughts held no other thing, his consciousness grasped no other reality, than this one living priceless surety of *her*, that came home to his heart, beyond doubt, beyond suspicion, with all the divine force of a resistless truth. Memories of evil and of crime floated, shapeless, amid the sudden glory that seemed to fill the gloom of his midnight prison with the glow of a southern dawn: he let them pass,—he could not hold them. She unloosed herself from his arms, and knelt once more beside him, so that, in the dim shadowy rays of the lamp he could only see the paleness of her upturned brow. She longed to be sheltered even from his sight, in that hour. She had no fear but that the greatness of his nature would reach to mercy and to pardon. She knew that justice to the uttermost, and an infinite tenderness, would ever be hers at his hands. But none the less she knew that through her he would perish; and none the less were the shame that she must reveal against her race, the taint of cowardly crime that must rest on her by implication, the degradation of her name that she must lay bare before him, bitter beyond all bitterness to the pride that was born at once of royalty and freedom, to the courage that would have faced a thousand deaths rather than have bent down to one act of baseness.

"Forgotten?" she echoed, where she bowed herself at

his feet. "You are wronged so deeply, that no love but yours could ever outlive such wrong. Listen! I have spoken but truth to you. I have striven to save you with all the might that was in me. I have never been false to you by deed, or word, or thought. But—all the same—your life is lost through me; and in me you see the daughter of your vilest foe, of the man who shot you down with a brigand's murder and a coward's secrecy. Yes! I!—I!—I!—who believed no empress never had wider reign, who have treated men as dogs beneath my feet, who have told you the legends that gave me heroes' and sovereigns' blood in my veins;—I have greater shame upon me than the poorest serf that ever crawled to take bread at my gates. I am the associate and the accomplice of an assassin. I am the daughter of Conrad Phaulcon."

He heard; and the words carried their way to his mind, that had been delirious with the weight, and now was giddy with the release, of pain. He heard; and the violence of the hatred he had borne this man shook him afresh, as tempests shake strong trees. He breathed slowly and heavily. With the rich liberty of his arisen joy came a deadly and heartsick oppression; with the sweet daylight of his renewed faith came the poison-mists of a dead crime.

"My God!—how you must have suffered!"

The suffering that such a tie as this had cost her was his first thought; before all other.

"You think of me, and for me still—still!"

"When I shall have ceased to think of you, I shall have ceased to live."

Burning tears fell from her eyes upon his hands. She would not let him raise her nearer him, but knelt there where the faint and gold-hued light of the dying lamp strayed softly to her, and fell upon her head like a halo of martyrdom in the pictures of old masters. He stooped to her.

"Tell me all."

"All my shame?"

"Not yours; you had no share in it, or you would not kneel there to-night."

"Yes, mine; for the shame of one man is the shame of his race and the evil that is shielded is shared."

She felt him shudder for one moment from her.

"Stay! You were never leagued with that infamy?"

"Against your life? No. I suspected—I feared—but they dreaded me, and hid it from me. Once I brought it against him, and he swore by the memory of my mother that he was innocent. This one oath he had used to hold sacred. By it he duped me—that once."

A hate, unforgiving and deadly, ran through the thrill of the words. In the sight of her fearless eyes the one unpardonable guilt was the dastardly guilt of a lie.

"Tell you all?" she pursued, while her voice rose swifter, and gathered the fluent eloquence which was natural to her as its warmth to the sun "In years I could not! Tell the torture of that companionship I have endured so long? Ah! you must paint it to yourself; no words of mine could give it. Look! I am brave, I am born linked with a coward; I am proud, I have been bound to a man who never knew what it was to wince under the lash of dishonor; I am ambitious, and I have been leashed with an adventurer whom the whole continent brands as a knave; I have loved truth and the people's rights—it is all that has redeemed me—and I have been fastened hand and foot to the baseness of intrigue, the venality of mock patriotism, the criminal craft of secret societies. Look! That man could hear what you called me and deemed me a few hours ago; and he could hold his peace, and laugh, and never breathe one word, or strike one blow, to defend my honor, to redeem my name. That will tell you what his life has been."

A bitter curse moved his lips as he heard.

"Why did you stay me when my hand was on his throat?"

"Could his guilt annul his tie to me? By that one bond he has claimed his immunity, and enforced my forbearance, through all the evil of his years."

"Yet,—why not have told me?"

"Because I was bound to silence by my oath. Look! I told you how my early life was spent, but I could not tell you the influence Conrad Phaulcon had on it. My mother died while I was in infancy. She was the love of his youth, and she had passed away from him ere she had

worn that love out. There are green places which never wither in the hearts that are searest; such was her memory to him. But her race he hated with a reckless hatred; he had looked to share their dominion when he wedded her, but there was feud between him and Julian. And Julian read him aright, and held him in distrust, and none of their wealth came to him, and he hated their greatness with a bitter envy. I have had him curse my face because it was like the Byzantine line; yet, on the whole, he loved, and was gentle to me. And I—I thought him a god, a hero, a patriot. He was a communist, an agitator, an adventurer; but I knew none of those names. I thought mankind was divided into the oppressors and the oppressed, into the haters and the lovers of liberty, and I revered him as a Gracchus, a Drusus, an Aristogiton, stoned by the nation's ingratitude! Once he was proscribed, and I knew where he lay hid, though I was but a few summers old, and they took and starved me to make me speak. Because the food would not tempt me, they tried blows; and when I still kept silent, they wondered, and at last let me go, because one of their patriarchs reproved them, saying I was more faithful to man than they were to God."

"And he knew that you—his young child—suffered that for him?"

"Surely he knew it, later, in Athens."

"And it failed to make you sacred in his sight?"

"Nay, it only showed him that I was perhaps of the steel that would furnish him forth a choice weapon! I was proud to suffer for him; I adored him then; and chiefly of all because I believed him sworn to the peoples' good, and a martyr for the sake of freedom. While I was still so young those things were still so close at my heart! And he loved me in answer then, though I saw him seldom, and might have lived on charity but for Julian Vassalis; then, and until the time came when, there being no male of the great Byzantine race left, I succeeded to the whole of its splendor, and, by the will of the dead chief, bore its name. From that moment the hate his foiled ambition and his cheated avarice bore against the Vassalis line blent against me with the old tenderness that he bore me, and from that moment he saw in me only—his prey."

She felt his hands clinch; she heard his breath catch on passionate words of imprecation.

"Ah, peace, peace!" she murmured to him. "Aid me rather to forgive—if I can. My own wrongs I might, but yours——"

"Nay, mine are but of the hour, yours are lifelong. Tell me all—all."

"I could not if I spoke for years! A brave nature bound to a coward, a proud one leashed with dishonor—that is an agony that lies beyond words. When he saw me thus, so young, given this wealth and this power he had so vainly desired, a desire of vengeance entered him against me; and also, with the craft of his school, he saw in me a fitting instrument for his many schemes. Well he knew his sway over me; Julian dead, there remained none to counteract it. A revolutionist ere I could reason, and ambitious with an ambition far outleaping all the goals of the modern world, a child still in my ignorance of actual things and my belief in the omnipotence of truth, yet already mistress of what seemed to me the magnificence and the dominion of a Cleopatra, I came to his snare as a bird to the fowler's. I would have gone to martyrdom to have liberated the nations; I would have sold my soul to have reached the sovereignty of a Semiramis. By these twain—my strength and my weakness—he ruled me. And through them, in all that glorious faith of my youth, he bound me by oath to himself and his cause. That oath I have never broken."

There was silence for many moments. Then she spoke again, while the dying lamp sunk lower and lower, and the halo ceased to fall upon her brow.

"Many besides me, unseen of men, wear those secret fetters of political oaths sworn in the rashness of their youth and faith to what they believed the cause of freedom—to what too late they know an inexorable and extortionate tyranny that through all their after-lives will never spare. While I thought myself an empress they were fastened round me, and made me a slave. Ah! I cannot travel back over that waste of years! It is enough that I swore fealty to his cause and obedience to his order—that I swore, moreover, adhesion with him in all things,

and secrecy upon the tie he bore me. This last thing I vowed because he willed it—it was easy to maintain. His marriage had long been concealed from fear of the Vassalis' wrath; and when the world knew me, I bore another title than his. Too late I learned what this fatal exaction cost me. Had I been known as his daughter, the evil notoriety he had gained would have sufficed to blemish my own repute. As it was, I might as well have come forth from a lazar-house or a felon's cell. None knew his tie to me, except of late years, the traitor who taught you to see in him my lover, my accomplice. True, my riches, my youth, my ancient name, my brilliancy and extravagance of life—other gifts that men saw in me—all brought me celebrity, notoriety, triumphs—such as they were. But from the first to the last—companioned by him—they were darkened by falsehood. And he—ah! you may well ask if a man's heart ever beat, if a man's blood ever glowed in him!—knew it, knew it long ere ever I dreamt it, and let the shadow of his own evil fame be upon me, because, through it, his schemes were best served; because, by it, he could best secure what no other should ever share with him—the wealth that I held and he coveted. He feared that I might one day break from him, that I might one day give the love I give you. So he desired men to think me worthless as they would, and his presence beside me sufficed to fulfill his desire! No, no! do not pour on me those noble words, I am not worthy of them. Though sinned against, I am not sinless. When too late I saw what my fatal promise had wrought for me. I was in love with the dangers, the victories, the sway, the intoleration I had plunged into; I had drunk so deep and so freshly of the draught of Power, I could not have laid down the cup though I had known there was death in it. And—under scorn and hate, and all the unutterable misery that came to me when I saw myself betrayed by him—my very nature changed. I grew hardened, reckless, pitiless. My loyalty to liberty, to truth, to the peoples, never altered; but that was all the better thing left in me. I remained faithful, even to a traitor. But the world and I were forever at war. I cared not how I struck, so that I only struck home. Evil had been spoken against me falsely,

and I lived in such fashion that they should know one woman at least breathed whose neck could not be bent, nor whose spirit bowed by calumny. Men came about me, mad for the smile of my lips, but not true enough in themselves, as you were true, to pierce to the truth in me, and I gave them a bitter chastisement for their blindness: I slew them with their own steel. But—oh God! what avail to tell you this? I can tell you how that which was spoken against me has, in part, been truth deserved, and, in part, the malignant coinage of envy. I can tell you that at dawn to-day I had no choice but to leave myself a traitress in your sight, or see you slaughtered by him as the issue of my love. I can tell you this—but what avail? You perish through me, for me, by me! What use that you should hold me faithful to you? I am none the less your murderess because I would give my life for yours, my love, my love, my love!"

Her voice that had been sustained and eloquent with the vital strength of remembered wrongs, failed her over the last words. The memory of the martyrdom which he had borne for her; the memory of the destruction of all his future, which through her befell him; the memory of the only existence that could ever now be his dragged out beneath the galley-chains, and companioned by the worst of criminals, alone remained with her. Guilty or guiltless, faithless or faithful, having cleaved to him or having forsaken him,—what mattered it? Wherein could it serve him? He was lost through her.

But this thought never came to him. His eyes looked down on her through the heavy shadow with a light in them that had the sweetness of release, the glory of victory through all the infinite pain and hopelessness of their fated love.

"What avail?" he answered her. "Do you know me yet so little? Do you not know that I could lie down and die content, since I have heard that you are sinless?"

"I know, I know! You would have died for me when you thought me vile with the vice that I cherished, branded with the kisses of shame. And yet—is there no doubt with you now?"

"Doubt? Did ever I harbor it save at your own bidding?"

"Yet—what have you but my word, the word which that Iscariot told you was only a dulcet lie, soft and false on every ear?"

She felt the tremor of his passion run through all his limbs.

"Were I free but for one hour——"

"Be at peace. I have given him to vengeance."

Her voice had in it that strong immutable merciless vengeance that came to her with her eastern blood; that smote rarely, but when it smote, never wavered and never failed. Then her voice fell, hot tears dropped from her aching eyes, and she refused to be lifted to his heart, she shrank from his hand as though unworthy of its touch.

"Vengeance!" she moaned, "what use is it to me? You are lost through me—lost forever! You pity, honor, love me still! I could better bear your curse!"

In the darkness that was about them, she rather felt than saw the infinite tenderness of his eyes as they gazed down on her:

"Hush! Would you wrong me still? Can you not think one hour that lays your heart bare to me thus, and brings me thus the surety of your sinlessness, is worth to me a lifetime of common joy and soulless pleasure? Let its cost be what it will—it is well bought."

She knew he held it so; and for this, that he loved her with this exceeding holiness of love; for this, that the restoration of her nobility and honor in his sight was priceless to him, as no paradise purchased by her crime could ever have been; for this, the woe that she had wrought him, eat like iron into her soul.

"Well bought! It will be bought by a living agony of endless years! Manhood, pride, peace, joy, all killed in you; your very name lost, your very fate forgotten, till your hair is white with sorrow and your eyes are blind with age! Ah, God! what matter what I be! It is I who have condemned you to this! It is I who have been your ruin!"

His arms drew her upward, close against the heart that only beat for her; his hot lips quivered on her own; in

the night-silence and the darkness that was on them his voice thrilled through her "sweet as remembered kisses after death."

"Do you think they shall ever part us now? Death shall unite us, if Life cannot."

The hours passed, and they were left in solitude. As they had forgot all other life save their own, so by it they seemed forgotten. Through the heavy masonry of the iron-bound walls, no echo of the world without came to them; on the hush and the gloom of the chamber there was no sound, save only the soft gliding of a night-bird's restless wing. Whatever fate rose for them with the dawn, this night at least was theirs: there is no love like that which lives victorious even beneath the shadow of death; there is no joy like that which finds its paradise even amid the cruelty of pain, the fierce long struggle of despair.

Never is the voluptuous glory of the sun so deep, so rich, as when its last excess of light burns above the purple edge of the tempest-cloud that soars upward to cover and devour it.

The hours passed, and the rays of the morning slowly stole inward through the narrow casement, bedded high above in the granite-blocks, while with the coming of the day the birds of the night returned from their outward flight, and nestled in their dark haunts with their eyes hid beneath their wings. As the first light touched her brow, —and the dawn came not there till the day was full-risen for the earth without,—she smiled in his eyes, and loosened from her bosom the slender steel blade, scarce broader than a needle's width, that had rested there so long.

"Take it. You have said—they shall not part us now."

His hand closed on it while his smile answered hers.

"I will find strength enough for that;—it shall give us eternal liberty, eternal union."

Once before he had pledged this promise to her. And as she had known then, so she knew now, that he would find strength to deliver her from dishonor and himself from captivity; strength to be true to her, even to the last thing of all.

Having reached the supreme ecstasy and the supreme

anguish of life, death was to them, as to the races of the young world, the god of deep benignant eyes, whose touch was release, and whose kingdom was freedom, on whose face was light, and in whose hands was balm.

Even as the words left his lips, on the quiet of the air a single shot rang.

The first sunbeam had slanted through the slender chink above; the stillness was intense; far below the measured step of the sentinel fell muffled on the turf, and the liquid stealing music of water, that fell down through thick acanthus foliage without, alone was dimly heard. At that moment, as the brightness of the day reached high enough to enter the vaulted chamber of the upper story of the granary, the stillness was thus broken. There was a stifled cry; then silence reigned again; and on that silence there was heard no more the monotonous tread to and fro of the soldier on guard.

He started to his feet, his hand on the Venetian steel he had just grasped.

"The man is shot!"

His voice was low and rapid, his eyes turned on hers with the same thought which came to both alike. There were those in that world they had lost who would have done all that courage and true friendship could in their service had they known of their extremity; there were men by the score who would have let their lives be mowed down like the millet sheaves around them in her cause, had they had power to reach her from the grip of priest and king.

Hope had been dead in them.

In the lowest depths of woe the oblivion of passion had made them senseless to all else—senseless even to the fate that must await them with the awakening of the dawn. But no thought of deliverance had ever come to them. It had seemed meet that their lives should end, once having reached the deepest joy that life could hold; joy taken from the very jaws of the grave; joy burning through the frozen chillness of despair.

Yet now, when hope, vague as remembered dreams, once touched them, they felt drunk with it as with the fumes of wine.

They listened, as none ever listen save those on whose straining ear the first sound that falls will bring the message of death or life.

For a moment that hushed stillness lasted, unbroken now by even the treading of the soldier's feet. Then there broke forth the loud rejoicing bay of a hound loosed on to his quarry: shot answered shot, steel clashed on steel: the din of tumult filled the soft peace of the early day; the old-remembered rallying words that had so often floated to her ear above the din of conflict, vibrated on it now—"Italia!" "Idalia!"—the two names blent in one.

As she heard, she rose erect; her whole frame seemed to strain upward to the sun that glanced through the high bars of their prison-room; there were fire in her eyes, light on her lips, the glow of liberty on all her face and form. She was the living symbol of Italy unchained.

"Do you hear? Do you hear?" she cried to him. "*She* is free!"

Before her own freedom—even before his—the liberation of the nation, so long enslaved, came to her heart first; then, while the great tears coursed down her cheeks, she clung to him, trembling with a terror that had never touched her fearless life—the terror lest for him, as for the land for which she had so long endured and suffered, this hope only dawned again to die out in endless night.

"Ah, God! give them strength—courage—victory!" she prayed, as she lifted her face to the sun. "My love, my love! listen for me, listen! I cannot hear. Hope kills me—hope for you!"

They stood there, barred in, in the shadows which that ray of wandering sunlight on high alone parted, while beneath them unseen raged the struggle on which their lives hung. Confused, broken, indistinct, the echoes of the contest came strangely through the hushed prison-chamber. The bitter riot of war tossed to and fro the fate of their coming years; the balance of chance swung, holding their destiny, and they could not tell to which side the scale was swaying; the measure of blood would be the purchase-coin of their ransom, or the price of their bondage, and they could not know whether foe or friend now claimed it. They stood, locked in, in solitude, with but a hand's-breadth of

the morning sky through the grating above their heads the only thing visible of all the living world without, and heard the tumult striving far beneath upon whose issue all their future hung.

The time was very brief; a little bird upon an ivy-coil outside the window-bars, had lifted its voice in daylight-song as the first shots were fired, and still was singing softly and joyously, untired; but to them the moments seemed as years. At last, loud and rejoicing on the summer air, wild vivas broke the bitter noise of conflict, and crossed the moans of fallen men; the dropping shots grew fewer and fewer. Upon the stone stairway the rapid upward rush of feet came near; the bolts were drawn back, the door was flung aside; with his flanks white with foam, and his mighty jaws crimson with gore, the great dog sprang on her with a single bound; behind him, upon the threshold, stood Conrad Phaulcon.

His eyes met theirs one instant; then headlong at her feet he fell, a deep, slow stream of blood staining the gray stone of the floor.

Thus at last he met his foe. Thus at last his foe looked on him after the weary search of baffled vengeance, long and hot as tiger's thirst.

As he fell his hands caught the hem of her dress.

"Idalia! Idalia!——"

The word died as his head smote the granite, and the broken sword he had pressed into his side to lend him strength for a moment pierced farther, driven in by the weight of the fall.

Erceldoune staggered forward and raised him.

"He is dying!" he said, as he looked at her. There came upon him a strange awe as he saw the death that at dawn he had so nearly dealt, smite thus, as another day broke on the world, the man from whom he had fled, as David from the sight of Saul, lest murder should be upon his head if longer he lingered where his enemy lay.

She never spoke, but sank on her knees beside her father where he had fallen, held up in the arms that a score of hours before had flung him upward like some worthless driftwood to be cast into the flames. Her eyes were fastened on his flushed and haggard face, that still had so much left of the old bright classic beauty.

"You have saved us! You——!"

She doubted her own senses; she thought she dreamt as madly as though she were dreaming that the heavens opened and the angels and archangels of medieval story descended with the sword of Michael, with the spear of Ithuriel, to their rescue.

He drew his breath with a great sigh, and his voice came in broken whispers.

"You said right—there are things gods would not pardon,—your wrongs are of them. You stung me at last!"

She did not answer; she gazed at him with blind tearless eyes that saw his face, but only saw it as in the mists of dreams.

He pressed the sword that had broken off in his loins closer and harder to stanch the blood, while his voice rose ringing and resonant.

"Our day has come! They have Palermo; Naples must follow. The king has enough to do to think of his capital. They fear the news should get to the populace. We have done a bold stroke to-day; they have been hunting us down like wolves, but we have turned and torn them. The sentinel killed, the rest was easy. Ah! look you,—there is vengeance for you too. That white-faced Northerner betrayed you to Giulio Villaflor. Well, the boy Berto caught him in his own toils. They hold him safe; they will kill him like a cur at your word. Ah, Christ! how the steel pierces! I would not die if I could help it. Not just now—not till I have seen that traitor's face. It is hard—hard—hard. He has cut and galled me so often; to die just when I could pay him all!"

The ferocious words gave way as his breath caught them; he moved restlessly, driving the blade in still, so that by this means he might yet gain a moment's force. As his wandering glazing eyes glanced upward he saw whose arms supported him; and the old relentless hate glowed in them—dark and deathless.

"So! he has his vengeance, and I am balked of mine! Lay me down, signore. I would sooner die a minute earlier than gain the minute by your help."

The old savage tiger lust was in the words. Erceldoune

never heeded them, he rested the Greek's head on his own breast, and held him upward with gentleness and in silence.

Idalia hung over him with one prayer only on her lips, one command only in her voice.

"Tell him—tell him! If you would atone for your sin—if you would redeem your infamy—if you have ever known remorse—bear me witness what you are to me!"

The evil faded off his face; a softer look came back there.

"Late—late—late!" he sighed: yet he lifted his head and made the sign of the cross with that latent superstition which lingered in him even while he made reckless jest of Deity, and denied with flippant laughter man's dreaming hope of God.

"By her mother's memory I swear,—Idalia Vassalis is my daughter. To her most bitter calamity. Those who have spoken evil against her have lied. I have been a coward, a traitor, a shame, and a darkness forever on her path; but—she has ever been loyal to me. She never feared, and she was never faithless; I loved her for that; but,—for that too,—I hated her."

As the words, more vivid in the southern tongue he used, left his lips firmly and distinctly, her eyes filled slowly with tears, and across the stricken form of the wounded man, met those which had seen her aright through all the mists of calumny, which had looked down through the shadows of doubt, and read, despite them, the veiled truth of her life. The faith in him had been sore tried; but at length, after many days, his reward came.

Neither spoke. That one look uttered all between them. Conrad Phaulcon pressed his hand closer yet upon the jagged steel that for a few brief moments still could thus hold life in him. Something of his old laugh hovered on his lips.

"Look! I make a fair ending. Pity there is no priest to crow above me. Death-bed repentance!—there is no coin like it; you sell the game you have lost already, and you buy such a fine aroma for nothing——"

She shivered at the awful mirth as she stooped to him, and passed her hand over his forehead.

"Silence! Live rather to repent! He will forgive; and I—you have tried my mercy long, you need not fear it now."

"No," he muttered, more huskily, more faintly. "If you had been willing to take your vengeance you could—long ago—you knew what would have sent me to the galleys. But you were true to your word. Strange, strange enough! You were so bold, so careless, so proud, so reckless; but one could hold you in a bridle of iron, if once you had given your word!"

His sight, that was beginning to fail him, sought her face with a wondering, baffled glance; through whole life this loyalty to her pledged honor had bewildered him, even while by it he had found so merciless a power to bind and to drive one whom fear could never have swayed, nor force have moved. As she heard, she lost remembrance of the deadly wrongs done against her by the man who should have been her foremost guard, her surest friend; all the long years through which he had persecuted and poisoned her freedom and her fame fell from her; lying, in his last hour at her feet, having thus at last, however late, however slightly, redeemed the cruelty of his past against her, he brought to her but one memory;—that of a long perished time, when on her childish ear his voice had come like music, breathing the poetry and the heroism of the world's dead youth.

"Be more just to us both!" she murmured, while the salt drops fell from her eyes upon his brow. "What I remembered always was what you at last remember too,—the love you bore my mother, the love she gave to you. Let it bring peace at last between us."

He shuddered as she spoke.

"God! If priests' and women's tales be true, and she lives in another life! I would go to hell, if a hell there were, sooner than see her face,—sooner than hear her ask of you at *my* hands."

"Hush! Have I not said *I* forgive?"

The soft and solemn cadence of the mournful words seemed to fall upon his ear with a deep calm he dared not, or cared not to break; he lay silent some moments, breathing heavily, while his drooped lids hung as though in

sleep; then with a sudden upleaping of the vivid life within him, he raised himself once more, while the careless melody of his sweet laugh echoed with its old chime through the air.

"I have been a coward all my life. Well—I will die like a hero. They will make me a martyr when I am gone! Why not? Let my epitaph lie as it will, it cannot lie like a priest's or a king's! So this is the end of it all; the drama is not worth the playing. They have taken Palermo, I tell you;—Well! they revile us, but after all, we have truth in us; the people will see that one day. The capital is all in confusion. They could only leave you a half-dozen guards. Lousada and Veni, and a few others, thought we could do something if we struck well,—they have got a brigantine too,—if you fly at once, you will be safe."

The incoherent fragments of speech were panted rapidly out; scarce pausing for breath, he looked once more upward at Erceldoune; with the old unquenched hatred still burning dark in his glance.

"You will have the Vassalis' fief! Ah! that cuts harder than the saber. I would give twenty lives now to keep you asunder from her. But—she stung my memory; conscience, fools call it; I could not free her without freeing you, or I would have done. You hate me?"

"I pity you—beyond all words."

"Because I lie here like a shot cur?"

"No. Because you wronged her."

There was a meaning in the grave and weary answer that checked the fretting and galled passions of the dying man.

"Yes, I wronged her. It was for Julian's wealth that I hated her. Sir—you swore to deal me my mortal stroke. Keep your oath. Pluck that broken steel out of my loins; I shall not live a minute. You will not? Why, you break your vow! God!—how the pain burns! Look here, then!"

With a sudden movement he drew the blade out from the wound in which it was bedded; the pent-up blood, let loose, poured from it: he smiled. It seemed as though in that hour the courage of his Achæan fathers flowed into

the veins that were fast changing to ice beneath the throes of dissolution.

"My life has disgraced you: my death will not," he said, as his heavy eyes were lifted to hers. "Can you forgive all?"

"God is my witness,—all."

"Ah, you were ever generous! Idalia——"

And with her name thus latest upon his utterance, as it had been the latest utterance of so many, his head fell back upon her bosom, and through his parted lips the lingering breath came in one long, deep-drawn sigh.

When that sigh ceased to quiver in the silence, he lay dead in the morning light.

The low, dark entrance had filled in that moment with armed men; their weapons dropped blood, their faces were hot with the heat of war and of victory, their passions were at white heat with the madness of joy; they were of that nature which long before showed its southern grandeur in the midnight charge of the Aurelian trench, and made the five hundred of the Legion pierce their way through the dense and hostile host at Mazzarene. At their head was the young boy Berto; all his slender limbs quivering with the glory of triumph, and his fair face, with the yellow hair flung back, transfigured like the face of some angel of vengeance. He came eagerly through the gloom of the porchway, followed by the Italians, who obeyed him as though he were a god; he had received the baptism of blood when his mother had been shot down by the Papal troops; he was the son of a great patriot who had fallen at the gates of Rome; and while yet in the first years of his infancy he had stood at the knee of the Liberator, and laughed to see the balls pour down upon the Savarelli roof around them, the hands of Ugo Bassi had been laid in benediction upon the golden curls of the young child of liberty. His word was the law, his sword was the scepter, of the men who came with him now.

Breathless, covered with dust, bruised, wounded, but with a marvelous luminance beaming through the calm, unchanged repose of his colorless face, he came to her in the flush of his triumph.

"Eccellenza! we bring you the best gifts of life!—we bring you liberty; we bring you vengeance."

Then, as he saw the dead man lying there, his proud and glad voice dropped, he made a soft, backward movement of his hand, signing his followers to pause upon the threshold, he bent his delicate head in reverence.

"He has won higher guerdon than we," he said, gravely; "he has died for you."

For he had no knowledge that this one hour of remorse had been the single, narrow thread of gold unraveled from the long, twisted, tangled, poisoned web of a lifetime of wrong.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"LOST IN THE NIGHT, AND THE LIGHT OF THE SEA."

AROUND the high-leaping flames of a fresh pile of pine-boughs, that flashed their luster on the hanging crystals and the hollow depths of the cavern by the sea, the Italians who had freed her were gathered when the night had fallen. They stood in a half circle about the great pyramid of fire, whose heavy aromatic scent rolled out down the vaulted space; the light and shadow played upon their bronzed faces, on the metal of the rifles, on whose muzzles they leaned their hands, and in the darkness of their eyes that were lustrous with longing rage and impatient joy. Joy for the sweetness of the surpassing hope that the past day had brought; Palermo won, Naples would follow; their sail once loosened to the touch, they would be with the Thousand of Marsala, with the deliverers of Sicily. Rage against a prisoner set in their midst, a prisoner who had been false to Italy, and false to the woman whom they loved as soldier and servant, noble and minstrel, alike loved Mary Stuart.

The silence was unbroken even by a loud-drawn breath; the sound of the flame consuming the lithe limbs of the wood was the only thing that stirred it. They waited for her judgment, and they had known that judgment inexo-

rable as those given from the stone justice seat in the early ages of her own city of the Violet Crown. With his arms bound behind him, while they stood around him, ready to spring at a word upon him and sheathe their steel in his body with the fierce swift justice of the south, they held captive the man who had sold her to Giulio Villaflor.

To this end had his high ambitions come.

He had known that, soon or late, his sin of treachery would almost surely find him out; would reach him though he were housed within kings' palaces; would strike him down even amid those gods of gold and silver for which he had bartered his brethren. Yet the vengeance he had looked for had been the concrete vengeance for his outraged oath, of his forsaken order; of that body politic to which he had sworn the secret vows of his implicit obedience; and even this vengeance, in the oversight of that intelligence which deemed itself safe enough and sure enough to play with all, and remain true to none, Victor Vane had held lightly. Rulers who wore the purple of power had been scarcely less false to such oaths than he, and he had thought that for him as for them the blow might be temporized with, warded off, bought off, until he like them should have risen too high for even that unerring and invisible hand to reach. But now, by the men whom he had scorned, with all the scorn of his astute abilities, as the mere raw material that may be turned to the statesman's successes, the fools of patriotic visions and rude honesties, of childish faith, and of barbarian warfare; by these he had been baffled, checked, vanquished, meshed in the intricate web of his own treacheries; by these he had been conquered and dragged down, to stand in his dishonor before the one glance which had power to make that dishonor worse to him than a thousand pangs of death. To this end had his life come!

An end more bitter to him it could never have reached, if his limbs had swung in the hot air of Naples from the hangman's chains. The hooting lips and ravenous eyes of the million of upturned faces of a railing populace would have been powerless to bring home to him his shame, as one regard bent on him brought it now.

For beyond the undulating wave of flame, and with that

gulf of fire and of shadow parting them, the gaze of Idalia rested on him.

At her side Erceldoune stood. His head was bent, his eyes were on the ground, and his arms were folded on his breast; he knew that if he looked up or unloosed his hand, he should break the word that he had passed to leave their vengeance with her, he should forestall the death-stroke that the soldiers of the revolution waited there to strike.

She faced them in the deep hush of the silence; so deep that through the cavern the far-off chiming of the waters on the shore could be faintly heard. The warm glow of the pine-flames, like the red sun that burns on the Nile, fell about her in a splendor of hot tawny gold. Her eyes were dark and dreaming, as with the memories and secrets of innumerable ages, like the unfathomable luster of the eyes that poets give to Cleopatra; her mouth was grave and weary as with the languor of past and deadly pain; her brow was in shadow, as though the shade of the thorn-crown of those who suffer for the people still was there; yet on her face there was a light beyond that which the burning sea-pines shed. It was the light of the dawn of freedom.

She never spoke; but her gaze rested on the man who had betrayed her into captivity—who had spoken falsely against her honor—who had given her beauty to the scourge, her freedom to the chains of her enemies. And he who was no coward, but bold and sure, and of self-control passing those of most men, closed his own eyes involuntarily, as though the lightning smote them, and cowered downward like a shrinking dog.

For what that long and silent gaze had quoted against him was wrong—far heavier than that against her own life: wrong against all manhood, as in him stained; against all human nature, as by him shared; against all bonds that bind man to man, as by his treachery dissevered; against all liberty sought for by the nations, as by his false adoption of its fair name, prostituted.

It was such reproach as this which that one unvarying gaze spoke to him; and there was soul enough left in him to make him know its deepest meaning, and taste its deepest agony.

"A traitor!"

Her lips had never spoken the word; but its shame ate into his heart as it ate into the heart of Iscariot. In that one moment the austere, the divine, the supreme majesty that lies in truth was revealed to him, and blinded him as the blaze of the heavens blinded Saul of Tarsus. In that one moment he knew what he had denied all his years through; that men who, for it, render their lives desolate and barren, and, for it, die unloved and forsaken of the world, may know in life and in death a beauty that never comes to the multitudes who grasp at gold, at power, at the sweetness of lascivious ease, and at the wide fools' paradise of lies.

The Italians who stood around him, leaning on their loaded rifles, while ever and again upon him turned the waiting savage brilliance of their glances, gave an impatient movement that shook the clangor from their arms out in a shrill echo.

"His sentence, Eccellenza!"

They were thirsty to deal him a traitor's due; to lead him out yonder on to the starlit sand, and with one volley fired on the still night air give him the death that all deserters meet, and see this justice done ere their boat should be thrust through the foam, and their oars should cleave the waters apart, and their vessel should be reached, that would bear them southward to where the Sicilies lay.

She made them no reply. Still with her eyes fixed on him she stood with the light that was like the after-glow of Egypt full upon her. To him she ceased to be the woman he had loved and coveted; she seemed to him transfigured; with that mystery of thought, with that infinitude of reproach, with that passionless scorn, and with that passionless pity on her face, she looked to him like the avenging shape of the honor he had sold, of the land he had betrayed, of the freedom he had surrendered, of the cause he had forsaken. The rebuke of her gaze was not hers, but the rebuke of the peoples, weary and abandoned by the leader who bartered them for gold; the scorn of her gaze was the scorn of the martyrs of liberty, who through all ages perish willingly, if with their bodies they can purchase one ray of higher light for the world which knows them not until too late

By her he saw how vile he had become.

By her he saw how high he might have reached.

She had her vengeance.

The impatient fire of the same demand ran afresh through the revolutionists around him:

"His sentence, Eccellenza!"

He never heard. He had passed through all the bitterness of death; it was her look that killed him.

The cry rose louder: "His sentence!"

Then at last she answered them:

"Loose him, and let him go."

A sullen furious yell of dissent that not even their loyalty to her could still, rolled through the vault.

"*È traditore! È traditore!*"

By his crime they claimed their justice.

A heavy sigh parted her lips; then the full sweet melody of her voice came on the clamor like music that moves men to tears.

"A traitor—yes! And for that you would deal him death? Nay, think me not gentler than you. I meant to deliver him up to your hands. I bade him be brought to my judgment, that your vengeance might strike him, and lay him dead at my feet. I am no holier than you. There was an hour in which I longed for his life with that thirst you know now; there was an hour in which I would have taken it, and not spared, though his mother had prayed to me. Ah, friends! such hours come to all. But now, the darkness has passed. I see clearer. Death is not ours to deal. And were it ours, should we give him the nameless mystic mercy which all men live to crave; give it as the chastisement of crime? Death! It is rest to the aged, it is oblivion to the atheist, it is immortality to the poet. It is a vast, dim, exhaustless pity to all the world. And would you summon it as your hardest cruelty to sin?"

They were silent; she stirred their souls—she had not bound their passions.

"A traitor merits death," they muttered.

"Merits it! Not so. The martyr, the liberator, the seeker of truth, may deserve its peace; how has the traitor won them? You deem yourselves just; your justice errs.

If you would give him justice, make him live. Live to know fear lest every wind among the leaves may whisper of his secret; live to feel the look of a young child's eyes a shame to him; live to envy every peasant whose bread has not been bought with tainted coin; live to hear ever in his path the stealing step of haunting retribution; live to see his brethren pass by him as a thing accurst; live to listen in his age to white-haired men, who once had been his comrades, tell to the youth about them the unforgotten story of his shame. Make him live thus if you would have justice."

They answered nothing; a shudder ran through them as they heard.

"And if you have—as I—a deliverance that forbids you even so much harshness, still let him live, and bury his transgression in your hearts. Say to him as I say;—'your sin was great, go forth and sin no more.'"

Then, as the words left her lips, she moved to him from out the light, and stooped, and severed the bonds that bound him, and left him free; and none dared touch that which she had made sacred, but stood mute, and afraid, as those who stand in the presence of a soul that is greater than their own.

And the man who had sinned against her, fell at her feet.

"Oh, God! If I had known you as I know you now!"

"You never had betrayed me. No!—Live, then, to be true to greater things than I."

While the night was still young, a ship glided southward through the wide white radiance of the moon. The waters stretched, one calm and gleaming sheet of violet light; from the fast-retreating shore a fair wind came, bearing the fragrance of a thousand hills and plains, of golden fruits and flowers of snow, and passion-blossoms of purple, and the scarlet heart of ripe pomegranates; through the silence sounded the cool fresh ripple of the waves as the vessel left her track upon the phosphor-silver, and above, from a million stars, a purer day seemed to dawn on all the aromatic perfumes of the air, and all the dim unmeasured freedom of the seas. And she, who went

to freedom, looked, and looked, and looked, as though never could her sight rest long enough upon the limitless radiance, nor her lips drink enough in of the sweet fresh delicious treasure that the waters gave and the winds brought;—the treasure of her liberty.

"You come to my kingdom!" she said softly, while her dreaming eyes met her lover's.

And he who had cleaved to her with that surpassing love which calumny but strengthens and fire but purifies, which fear cannot enter and death cannot appall, drew her beauty closer to his breast:

"My kingdom is here!"

And the ship swept on through the stillness of the hushed hours, through the glory of the light, to glide out through the eternal sea-gates of the old Roman world, and pass into the cloudless glow of eastern skies, where already through the voluptuous night the star of morning rose.

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